



Trauma Intervention Programs of San Diego

SIDS PARENTS NEED REASSURANCE

QUESTIONS THEY MAY ASK

REASSURANCE

1. SIDS is the major cause of death in infants from the ages of 1 - 12 months.
2. SIDS cannot be predicted or prevented.
3. Research to date indicated the cause is not suffocation, aspiration, or regurgitation.
4. A minor illness, such as a common cold, may often precede death, but many infants are entirely healthy prior to death.
5. There appears to be no suffering; death probably occurs within seconds, usually during periods of sleep.
6. SIDS is not contagious in the usual sense. Although a viral infection may be involved, it is not a "killer virus" that threatens other family members or neighbors. SIDS rarely occurs after 7 months of age.
7. SIDS is not hereditary; there is no greater chance for it to occur in one family than another.
8. The baby is not the victim of a "freakish disease." As many as 10,000 babies die of SIDS every year in the U.S.
9. SIDS occurs in all types of families. It has happened in the hospital with infants admitted for minor surgery.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Summarized from questions prepared by the National Foundation For Sudden Infant Death, Inc.)

1. Do these deaths always occur at night?
NO. They have occurred at all hours of the day and night, though more often at



night because that is when most sleeping is done.

2. Do these deaths always occur during periods of sleep?
YES. Some investigators have observed an occasional case when the baby was awake, but in a five-year study at the University of Washington, all cases where the baby was awake were determined to have been as a result of another disease.

3. Are all infants found on their tummies?
NO. Infants have been found sleeping in all positions - back, side, and tummy.

4. What caused the blotches in the infant's face when found face down?
 The blood pools by gravity after death, causing the discolored blotches. Sometimes when a baby is then put on his back, the blood drains out of the face; but this does not mean the baby was alive.

5. What caused the baby's face to be turned down into the mattress?
 This occurs frequently when the baby is sleeping on his tummy and may be caused by a spasm at the time of death. Often blankets are pulled up over the head or the baby may get into peculiar positions during terminal spasm.

6. Would it have made any difference if I had gotten to him sooner?
NO. As far as we know, SIDS cannot be prevented in any way. We know of no evidence that resuscitation can save a SIDS baby.

7. Could he have cried and I did not hear him?
NO. In interviewing hundreds of families, many slept in the same room with their babies, often with the bassinet right next to the parent's bed; and no one reported any sound at all at the time of death.

8. Does this occur more often in low income families?

YES. The rate is higher in low income families; however, it often occurs in middle and high income groups. Its occurrence reminds us of polio which was higher in poorer neighborhoods and yet affected notables like President Franklin Roosevelt.

9. What caused the blood around the baby's nose and mouth?
This is found frequently and results from a drainage of fluids from the lung. Tiny pinpoint hemorrhages occur in the lungs in SIDS, and these can discolor the lung fluid that drains out after death.
10. What caused the black and blue marks?
Sometimes infants are bruised when resuscitation is attempted. Other colorations that look like bruises happen after death.
11. How do you know it wasn't suffocation?
Studies have been conducted that prove covering the faces of infants with ordinary bed clothes is insufficient to cause suffocation. Even very young infants can lift their heads to find air space and blankets are made of woven fibers through which air can pass. Many SIDS babies are found with nothing covering their faces.
12. Could the baby have choked to death on mucus or regurgitated food?
It is common to find some regurgitated food around the infant's mouth, but this probably occurs after death with the relaxation of the throat. Many babies are put to bed with a bottle and we have no evidence that SIDS is caused by choking.
13. Does breast feeding prevent SIDS?
Both babies who are given only breast milk and babies fed only formula die of SIDS.
14. What caused the baby's death?
There are many theories, some of which seem more promising than others. Much more scientific research must be done; the cause of sudden infant death syndrome remains unknown.