



## SOUTHWEST PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

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### Public Health recommendations aim to reduce risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, the third leading cause of death in newborns up to age 1 in Georgia, strikes without warning signs or symptoms, but parents can educate themselves to reduce the risk of SIDS.

“The cause of SIDS is still unknown, but there are factors that we know increase the risk of babies dying of SIDS,” explained Southwest Georgia Public Health District Director Dr. Jacqueline Grant. “Reducing the risk factors associated with SIDS should reduce the number of SIDS deaths. Here in our Health District, we have an above-average SIDS rate, and bringing that rate down begins with educating parents and caregivers.”

From 2002 to 2006, 650 babies died of the mysterious syndrome in Georgia, with 29 of the deaths occurring in Southwest Georgia Public Health District’s 14-county area. During 2006 alone, SIDS claimed the lives of 150 Georgia babies, including 10 from Southwest Health District, Grant said.

“The SIDS numbers concern us,” she said. “Half of the SIDS deaths in 2006 were African American babies. We know we have a large African American population in our District, so the disparity is worrisome.”

Male babies are slightly more at risk than females. So are premature babies (born before 37 weeks) and low-birth-weight babies (under 5.5 pounds), Grant said.

Others most at risk of SIDS include:

- Infants who share a bed with others
- Babies born to mothers who smoked while pregnant
- Infants in homes with smokers
- Babies who are placed on their stomachs to sleep
- Infants who sleep in unsafe surroundings (beanbag, carseat, floor, couch, etc.)
- Babies born to women who receive little or no prenatal care
- Infants in cribs with fluffy pillows, blankets, stuffed toys and baby bumpers

While some factors may be beyond parental control, Grant said, there are steps caregivers can take to reduce the risk of SIDS.

“Public health recommends placing babies on their backs to sleep, both at napttime and at bedtime. Statistics have shown that fewer infants succumb to SIDS sleeping on their backs, compared to babies sleeping on their tummies,” said Grant.

Other tips include: breastfeeding the infant if possible; placing the baby in her or his own crib or other sleep area on a firm mattress; keeping fluffy pillows, stuffed animals, blankets and baby bumpers

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out of the baby's sleep area; avoiding placing babies on couches, futons, beanbags, waterbeds or carseats to sleep; and avoiding smoking around the baby.

"Babies who are overheated are also at increased risk of SIDS, so we recommend that the temperature remains between 65 and 72 degrees," Grant said. "Also, avoid over-clothing your baby while he or she is sleeping, since that increases the risk of overheating."

For more information about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, contact your local health department or go online to [www.cdc.gov/SIDS/](http://www.cdc.gov/SIDS/), the link to the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention's SIDS Home Page.

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