Memo to Black Parents: Comfortable Bedding Can Cause “Crib Death”

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When preparing a sleeping surface for babies, more than half of African-American moms surveyed said they used soft bedding such as pillows, blankets and quilts, despite warnings that comfortable cushioning increases the risk of infant death, according to a new study published in the journal *Pediatrics* and reported by Reuters Health.

For this study, researchers from the Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC, conducted one-on-one interviews and a small group discussion with 83 black mothers of newborns in Maryland and the District of Columbia. Scientists asked moms if they used soft bedding and/or bumper pads in their babies' cribs or other sleep spots. Next, researchers prompted the mothers to explain why they did or didn't use these bedding accessories.

Most moms explained they used the comfy bedding to ensure their kids were warm and comfortable. What's more, the mothers who favored lining cribs with bumper pads told researchers they worried that their babies might bump their heads on the railings or might get their arms or legs stuck between the rails. The parents mistakenly believed that a softer bed would be safer for the babies. But in fact, bumper pads, pillows and covers pose a suffocation risk.

Past surveys showed that while parents of all races misunderstand pediatricians' guidelines for safe bedding, black infants are more than twice as likely as white, Latino and Asian babies to die of accidental suffocation, strangulation or SIDS—a catch-all medical term for instances of sudden and unexplained infant death.

What are the best sleeping surfaces for infants? A firm crib mattress, experts said. Another alternative is a firm-surfaced bassinette. Mothers or parents-to-be can check American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines for further details.

In addition, there are best practices for how a parent should prep a baby for sleeping. One big no-no is to have babies share parents' beds. Why? This can put an infant at risk of suffocation. What's more, researchers found that parents often made the mistake of putting babies to sleep on their

sides or stomachs. These sleep positions increase an infant's risk of SIDS. So what's the best sleep position for bambinos? On their backs, experts agreed.

According to researchers, the study findings showed that safe bedding practices are not being relayed to parents, especially black parents. The study "is a very humbling lesson," said Debra Weese-Mayer, MD, a professor of pediatrics at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, who was not connected to the study. "Even though we think we're giving a very clear message [about sleep surfaces], if the parent and the caretaker are interpreting it in a way different from what we intend, we're not doing a very good job."

As a way to promote the right message, researchers suggested pediatricians talk not only with parents about SIDS and suffocation risks but also with other infant caretakers, such as friends, neighbors, babysitters or grandparents.

Click here to read about how pre-existing factors in mothers' lives affect birth outcomes.

Click here for the American Academy of Pediatrics' safe sleeping guidelines for infants.

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