

Infant deaths on the rise in licensed day care homes

Would you like to receive a correction order? Would you like your license to be taken away?

Now that I have your attention, I really encourage you to read the following information. The information is being sent to you because of the recent increase in infant deaths in licensed day care homes. From January 1, 2012 to March 1, 2012, there were six infant deaths in licensed day care homes throughout the State of Minnesota. This is a huge increase. The following information will advise you of ways to prevent being issued a correction order and ways to possibly prevent you from losing your license.

MN Statute [245A.1435](#) REDUCTION OF RISK OF SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME IN LICENSED PROGRAMS states that:

(a) When a license holder is placing an infant to sleep, the license holder must place the infant on the infant's back, unless the license holder has documentation from the infant's parent directing an alternative sleeping position for the infant. The parent directive must be on a form approved by the commissioner and must include a statement that the parent or legal guardian has read the information provided by the Minnesota Sudden Infant Death Center, related to the risk of SIDS and the importance of placing an infant or child on its back to sleep to reduce the risk of SIDS.

(b) The license holder must place the infant in a crib directly on a firm mattress with a fitted crib sheet that fits tightly on the mattress and overlaps the mattress so it cannot be dislodged by pulling on the corner of the sheet. The license holder must not place pillows, quilts, comforters, sheepskin, pillow-like stuffed toys, or other soft products in the crib with the infant. The requirements of this section apply to license holders serving infants up to and including 12 months of age. Licensed child care providers must meet the crib requirements under section [245A.146](#).

The short version of the information is:

- *infants are defined as children six weeks to 12 months
- *infants must sleep in cribs/portacribs/pack n plays (referred to as approved infant sleeping space)
- *infants must sleep on their backs in a crib/portacrib/pack n play
- *cribs/portacribs/pack n plays must have tight fitting sheets
- *there cannot be pillows, quilts, sheep skins, stuffed animals, wedges, soft products in the cribs/portacribs/pack n plays with the infants
- *we strongly recommend not swaddling the infant. If you are concerned about the infant being cold, use a sleep sack (not a swaddler). The sleep sack allows their arms freedom to move and they can still move their legs, but they are kept warm.

If you do all of the above, you have greatly reduced the risk that any infant will die in your care. And, you have decreased your chances of getting a correction order or losing your license.

Here is some additional information for you to read if you are interested. Since January 1, 2012, the state of Minnesota has had six infants (children under the age of one) die in licensed day care homes. I was unable to get specific details about the deaths because many are still under investigation. However, the Department of Human Services was able to tell me that they continue to hear/see reports of infants being slept in car seats, swings, bouncy seats, etc. and about infants being placed on their tummy or their side because they have reflux or a cold. They are also seeing items (pillows or blanket) being used in cribs/portacribs/pack n plays with the infants.

We, as licensors, have seen an increase in infants sleeping in swings, bouncy seats or car seats. Providers initially tell us that the infant will fall asleep there and then say they will move them after they get into a deep sleep. However, the provider will often not move the infant to a crib/portacrib/pack n play until we prompt them to move the infant. This is not okay. Providers need to move the infant to a crib/portacrib/pack n play as soon as they fall asleep. We also hear the excuse that the infant will just take a quick cat nap in the swing, bouncy seat or car seat. Again, this is not okay. When the infant falls asleep, they must be moved to a crib/portacrib/pack n play. Yes, they may wake up when you go to move them. That is why it is important to have the infant learn to fall asleep in their crib/portacrib/pack n play from the day they start in your care. The other excuse we often hear when infants are found sleeping in a swing, bouncy seat or car seat is that the baby has reflux and therefore should be slept upright. There definitely is an increase in infants diagnosed with reflux. However, the only way to sleep an infant someplace other than a crib/portacrib or pack n play is with a written doctor statement indicating a medical reason for the child not to sleep in a crib/portacrib/pack n play.

We also see on occasion, quilts, sheepskin or heavy blankets in the crib/portacrib/pack n play. MN Statute [245A.1435](#) REDUCTION OF RISK OF SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME IN LICENSED PROGRAMS specifically states that the above listed items cannot be in cribs/portacribs/pack n plays with infants. The Department of Human Services said that while the Statute says that there may be no “soft products”, the Department of Human Services has been a little “lenient” with “receiving type” blankets placed from the waist down and tucked in because the SIDS training and MN SIDS center have allowed it. However, that practice is now under discussion. When we get additional information about that, we will pass it along to you.

What should you do if you enroll an infant and the parents tell you to sleep the infant on their tummy or their side? If you are comfortable with sleeping an infant that way, you must have the parent sign the **Parent Directive for Alternative Sleep Position Form**. That form can be found on our website www.co.scott.mn.us and then go to child care licensing. Look under Links to DHS Forms and you will find that form. The parent filling out and signing the form gives you permission to sleep their infant some other way than on their back. Please note that this form does not allow parents to give you permission to sleep infants in swings, bouncy seats or car seats. It allows a different sleep position (side or tummy) but not a different sleep location. Infant must still be slept in a crib/portacrib/pack n play. The form also does not allow you to use any sleep position items in the crib/portacrib/pack n play such as wedges, blankets, slings, etc.

Another good use of the Parent Directive for Alternative Sleep Position Form is to have parents sign it when an infant start rolling over on their own if they prefer to sleep on their tummy. At that point, you can have the parents sign the form saying it is okay to leave them on their tummy if the infant turns over on their own. That way, both you and the parent are aware the baby is now turning over on their own, and that the baby prefers to sleep on their tummy. That form, when signed by the parents, would help protect you should anything happen to an infant while sleeping in your care.

What do you do if a parent wants you to sleep their infant on their tummy or their side and you are not comfortable with that? You have the right to say that while in your care, the infant will only be slept on their back. You can advise the parents that you will be following the SIDS Prevention Protocol by having the infant sleep on their back, in a crib/portacrib/pack n play.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) advised us to inform our providers that “if an infant in their care has any kind of medical emergency while sleeping, and during the course of the investigation, Scott County (and we - DHS) find that there were ANY infant sleep violations at all – our (DHS) practice has been to issue a Temporary Immediate Suspension. The only times we have not issued a Temporary Immediate Suspension in these cases were when the provider was following ALL safe infant sleep practices. You can tell your providers that we have begun discussions here about routinely issuing Fines for infant sleep violations. That is still up for discussion but I would say it’s pretty likely.” This is a direct quote from the Department of Human Services. They went on to say that “providers need to understand their liability in this and their responsibility in following the MINIMUM standards of the rule and statute. Their best practice should be to ALWAYS sleep an infant on their back in a crib, on a firm mattress, and follow all the other safe sleep and SIDS reduction requirements.”

Swaddling is another issue that needs to be addressed. Swaddling babies has been common practice for many, many years. And now, you can even buy items that are made specifically for swaddling infants. Swaddling newborns or preemies is often done to help them maintain their body temperature. But, by the time they start day care at six weeks or older, they are able to maintain their body temperature so swaddling is no longer needed. In fact, swaddling the infant could actually cause them to become too warm which increases their risk for SIDS. Swaddling is also used to help infants sleep better because it decreases their startle reflex which often wakes infants up. Did you know that some speculate that infants need that startle reflex to stop them from going into such a deep sleep that they die from SIDS? It has not been proven that the startle reflex does stop SIDS, but if there is any speculation that it might, wouldn’t you want to promote that? So, as mentioned, swaddling is concerning for several reasons. It can cause a baby to become too warm and it also decreases their startle reflex. Both could increase the risk for SIDS. If you are concerned an infant might get cold during rest time, we encourage the use of sleep sacks. They are one piece sleepers that allow the infant’s arms to still be free and therefore they are less restrictive.

So, there are some changes that we, at Scott County, need to make. In the past, if we witnessed an infant sleeping in a swing, car seat or unapproved infant sleeping space, we would usually advise you to move the baby. Now if we see it, we will be issuing a correction order. In the past, if we saw quilts, stuffed animals, pillows, etc. in approved infants sleeping spaces, we would ask you to remove them and not use them. Now, we will need to issue a correction order. If you are already following SIDS protocol, you have nothing to worry about. If you are not following it, you will need to make the changes immediately to not be issued a correction order or some other licensing action.

Now that I have told you things NOT to do, I also want to give you things you CAN do. To start with, before you enroll any infants in your program, have a discussion with the parents about the requirement for sleeping of infants in licensed day care homes. Let parents know that their infant must be slept in a crib/portacrib/pack n play. Encourage the parents to not allow the infant to sleep in a swing, bouncy seat or car seat on a regular basis at home. Explain to the parents how difficult it will be for their child to adjust to day care if they are not used to sleeping in a crib/portacrib/pack n play before coming to day care. Often, if you explain to the parents that you want the baby to have a good experience at day care, the parents are grateful that you are looking out for their child and they are more willing to work on things at home before bringing the infant to your home. Another thing to do is discuss with parents about not having their child become attached to a certain blanket. You can let the parents know that infants cannot have blankets in their crib/portacrib/pack n play so you would not be able to have a special blanket in the sleeping space with them. Again, remind the parents you just want their child to have a good day care experience.

And last, there are things you MUST do. They include only sleeping infants in approved infants sleeping space which are limited to cribs/portacribs/pack n plays. Sleep infants on their back in the crib/portacrib/pack n play. The crib/portacrib/pack n play must have tight fitting sheets. Do not put pillows, quilts, sheep skins, stuffed toys, bumper pads, wedges or soft products in with infants.

I hope that after reading this, most of you can say “wow, I already do everything that I must do so I don’t need to make any changes”. For those of you that said “oops, I am doing that wrong”, please make immediate changes and follow MN Statute [245A.1435](#) REDUCTION OF RISK OF SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME IN LICENSED PROGRAM to decrease the risk of SIDS to infants in your care.

Hopefully by us enforcing and providers following the SIDS protocol outlined in MN Statute [245A.1435](#) REDUCTION OF RISK OF SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME IN LICENSED PROGRAM, we can aid in the prevention of any providers or parents experiencing an infant death in day care.

See below for a checklist that you can print out as a quick reminder of do’s and don’ts.

SIDS PROTOCOL CHECKLIST YOU CAN PRINT OFF 4/2012

DEFINITIONS:

- Infant – child between the ages of six weeks and 12 months
- Approved infants sleep space – crib/portacrib/pack n play only

DO'S:	DO NOT:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do sleep all infants in a crib/portacrib/pack n play ○ Do Sleep all infants on their back ○ Do have a parent sign the Parent Directive for Alternative Sleep Position Form if the infant is to sleep on their side or tummy ○ If an infant under age one has a medical reason to sleep in something other than a crib/portacrib/pack n play, do get a written notice from the doctor which states: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the medical reason the child shouldn't sleep in a crib/portacrib/pack n play • where the child should sleep • and at what age the child should be re-evaluated or moved to crib/portacrib/pack n play ○ Do use a tight fitting sheet on the crib/portacrib/pack n play ○ Do use a sleep sack if you are concerned an infant may be cold during rest time ○ If an infant falls asleep in a swing, car seat, on the floor etc., move them to a crib/portacrib/pack n play immediately. ○ When the infant is able to roll over by themselves, if they prefer to sleep on their tummy, do have the parent sign the Parent Directive for Alternative Sleep Position Form at that time <p><u>Scott County strongly recommends:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You check on sleeping infants often 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do not sleep anyone under the age of one in a swing, bouncy seat or car seat ○ Do not sleep anyone under age one on the floor, couches or on a regular bed ○ Do not use a pillow, thick blanket, quilt, sheepskin, ○ Do not have stuffed animal, bumper pads or toys in with a sleeping infant ○ Do not put any sleep aides in with the infant such as wedge, bumzie, sling <p><u>Scott County strongly recommends:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That you not swaddle infants. Swaddling can overheat the infant. It can also reduce their startle reflex. Both of those may increase their risk of SIDS

Parent Directive for Alternative Sleep Position can be found on our website at www.co.scott.mn.us under Child Care Licensing.