



THE MASSACHUSETTS CENTER FOR UNEXPECTED INFANT AND CHILD DEATH

Helping Families and Communities Grieve the Death of a Child Under the Age of 3 since 1975

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SIDS/SUID

For more information, check out the Center's publication on [SIDS/SUID in the National Association of Perinatal Social Workers Spring 2020 FORUM](#)

What is the difference between SIDS and SUID?

FACTS AND FIGURES:
MA Center for Unexpected Infant and Child Death

Most SUIDs are listed as one of three types:

#1



Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

The sudden death of an infant less than 1 year of age that cannot be explained after a thorough investigation is conducted, including a complete autopsy, examination of the death scene, and a review of the clinical history.

#2



Unknown Cause

The sudden death of an infant less than 1 year old that remains undetermined because one or more parts of the investigation was not completed.

#3



Accidental Suffocation & Strangulation in Bed

The sudden death of an infant less than 1 year of age that can happen because of:

- Suffocation by soft bedding—for example, when a pillow or waterbed covers an infant's nose and mouth
- Overlay—when another person rolls on top of or against the infant while sleeping
- Wedging or entrapment—when an infant is wedged between two objects such as a mattress and wall, bed frame, or furniture
- Strangulation—for example, when an infant's head and neck become caught between crib railings (for older cribs built prior to the regulation where slats were placed closer together so that infant heads cannot fit through)

Even after a thorough investigation, it can be hard to tell SIDS apart from other sleep-related infant deaths such as overlay or suffocation by soft bedding. This is because these deaths are often unwitnessed and there are no tests to tell SIDS apart from suffocation. To complicate matters, people who investigate SUIDs may report cause of death in different ways and may not include enough information about the circumstances of the event from the death scene.

Produced by: The Massachusetts Center for Unexpected Infant and Child Death
We support families, communities, and professionals after an unexpected death during pregnancy, infancy, or early childhood. Please visit <http://www.magriefcenter.org>
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <https://www.cdc.gov>

FACTS AND FIGURES:
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What is SUID?

Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) is the death of an infant less than 1 year of age that occurs suddenly and unexpectedly. The cause of death is not immediately obvious before investigation.

SUID includes all unexpected deaths: those without a clear cause, such as SIDS, and those from a known cause, such as suffocation. One-half of all SUID cases are SIDS.

Definition: Sudden death of an infant under 1 year of age which remains unexplained after a thorough autopsy and case investigation.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is NOT the cause of every infant death

SIDS is NOT...

- the same as suffocation and is not caused by suffocation
- caused by vaccines, immunizations, or shots
- contagious
- the result of neglect or child abuse
- caused by cribs
- caused by vomiting or choking

What is SIDS?

Why are these terms interchanged so much?

In recent years, medical examiners have drastically reduced listing SIDS as a cause of death.

The term "syndrome" in SIDS incorrectly implies a diagnosis or illness, when it is actually a diagnosis of exclusion.

Confusion is common because there is no national standard terminology for sudden and unexpected infant deaths AND because medical examiners are less likely to list SIDS as the cause of death.

Most infant deaths occur suddenly, and people are usually more familiar with the term SIDS than they are familiar with the term SUID. Therefore, it is often assumed that if the death is sudden, then it's SIDS.

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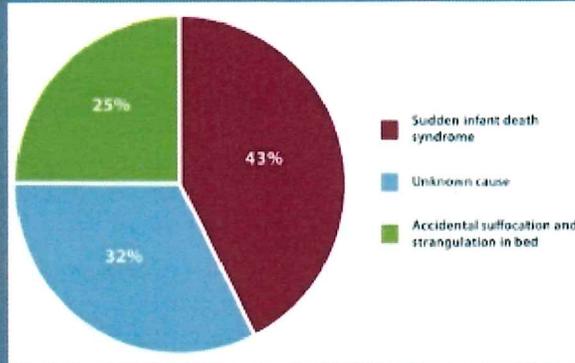
Facts and Figures

- SIDS is the leading cause of death for babies 1 month to 1 year of age.
- 90% of SIDS death occur before the baby is 6 months of age. Most SIDS death occur between 1-4 months of age.
- Approximately 4,500 infants die suddenly and unexpectedly in U.S. every year. 50% are due to SIDS. Deaths due to SIDS declined by more than 53% since 1990.
- Slightly more boys die of SIDS than girls, although the reason is unknown.

CHARTS AND GRAPHS

MA Center for Unexpected Infant and Child Death

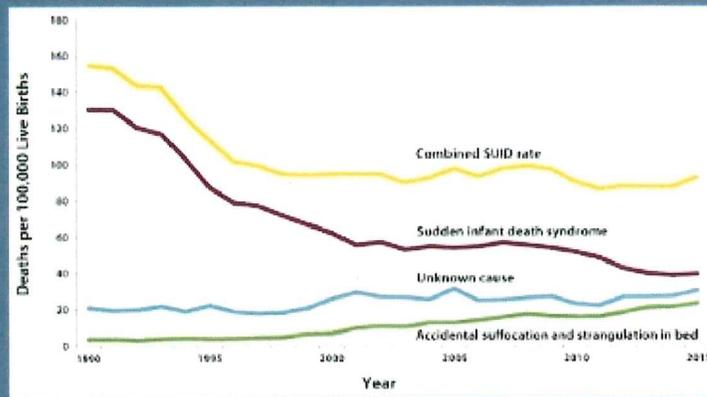
Breakdown of Sudden Unexpected Infant Death by Cause, 2015



43% of Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths (SUID) are classified as SIDS. Unknown Cause is the second most common type of death, followed by Accidental Suffocation and Strangulation in Bed.

Unknown Cause: Sudden death of an infant that remains undetermined because one or more parts of the investigation was not complete.

Trends in Sudden Unexpected Infant Death by Cause, 1990-2015



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