Bedding amount recommended for safe sleep

How much bedding should we place on baby when in a sleeping environment?

- Dress baby and use layers as you would dress or use layers yourself: to be comfortable, neither too hot nor too cold
- Research has shown that baby’s risk of dying suddenly and unexpectedly is increased if baby is sleeping on the tummy and that risk is even further increased if baby is sleeping on the tummy under heavy bedding or if baby’s head becomes covered by bedding in any position. Baby manages heat loss very efficiently when placed on the back to sleep with his/her head uncovered. Sleep baby on the back and keep baby’s head uncovered during sleep to reduce baby’s risk of sudden unexpected death
- Make up baby’s bed so baby sleeps at the bottom of the cot and the blankets can only reach as far as baby’s chest, ensuring baby cannot move down during sleep and get his/her head covered by bedding
- Consider using a safe baby sleeping bag
- Dress baby for sleep and add/remove lightweight blankets to ensure baby’s chest feels comfortably warm to the touch
- Remove hats, bonnets and hooded clothing from baby’s head as soon as baby is indoors

More detail
Since the introduction of public health programmes promoting ‘back-to-sleep’ to reduce the risk of Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) including Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and fatal sleeping accidents, there has been a significant reduction in the number of babies dying suddenly and unexpectedly (Tursan d’Espaignet et al 2008). However, tragically, around 120 babies die suddenly and unexpectedly every year in Australia (ABS 2013) and it is important to keep following evidence-based recommendations on ways to avoid risk factors related to baby’s sleep environment (ISPID 2013, Mitchell & Blair 2012).
The association between overheating and SIDS has been known for several years particularly if baby’s head is covered (Fleming et al 1990, Ponsonby et al 1992 & 1993, Stanton 1994). Current research confirms that if your baby becomes too hot, the risk of SUDI is increased (Kinney & Thach 2009). Overheating can be caused by room heating, high body temperature and excessive clothing or bedding (Byard & Krous 2001). To reduce the risk of this, SIDS and Kids recommend that you, as baby’s parent or carer, use your own judgement, taking into account factors such as where you live (climate, whether it is summer or winter), whether you have heating in the house, and whether baby has a cold or minor illness (which may cause their temperature to rise).

A useful guide is to dress baby as you would dress yourself: to be comfortable, neither too hot nor too cold. If baby has a minor illness and has a temperature it is common for parents or carers to overdress baby for sleep (Rognum 2001) but in fact, fewer bedclothes should be used or, at times, none at all. If parents or carers are worried that baby is ill they should talk to their baby’s doctor and have the baby assessed.

Both hyperthermia (unusually high body temperature) and hypothermia (unusually low body temperature) are important to avoid during infancy (Stanton 1984).

Baby’s face and head should always remain uncovered. Baby’s head (particularly the face) is the main route for heat loss (Wailoo et al 1989). Overheating has been found to be related to sudden infant death and the risk of overheating is increased if baby is sleeping on the tummy (Fleming et al 1990). This is especially dangerous if baby is under heavy bedding as, if baby should roll over onto the tummy, then the risk of overheating is even further increased. In fact, research has shown that babies sleeping on the tummy are at ten-fold the risk of SUDI while sleeping in a heated room (Ponsonby et al 1992).

**Can we say exactly how many blankets to use when baby is placed to bed?**

The simple answer is **No**. SIDS and Kids recommend that rather than state how many bedclothes can be safely placed on a baby, to work out the amount of bedding to be used after considering these factors:

1. The room temperature where baby is sleeping
2. How hot does the baby feel? A good way to check baby’s temperature is to feel baby’s chest (don’t worry if baby’s hands, face and feet feel cool - this is normal)
3. Whether the baby has a cold or infection or another special need
4. Consider how many layers that you as the baby’s carer are wearing comfortably.

Sleeping baby in a safe baby sleeping bag has a number of features that help baby sleep safely. Research has shown that sleeping bag use will reduce the risk of bedclothes covering the baby’s face (see FAQ 15), will delay baby rolling onto the tummy during sleep until baby is past the age of peak risk of SUDI (L’Hoir et al 1998) and will keep baby’s temperature at a more constant level while sleeping at home (Sauseng et al 2011).

If blankets are being used instead of a sleeping bag, it is best to use light weight blankets in layers that can be added or removed easily according to the room temperature and which can be tucked underneath the mattress. (For more information on how to prepare baby’s cot for sleep, see SIDS and Kids’ *Making Up Baby’s Cot*).

Always remove hats or bonnets from baby as soon as you come indoors or enter a warm car, bus or train, even if it means waking the baby (Fleming et al 1996). Never use electric blankets, wheat bags or hot water bottles for babies.
Please see our Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) number 16: How much clothing/bedding does baby need?

For more information on this topic, see the SIDS and Kids Information Statement on Room Temperature.

For further information on Safe Sleeping visit the SIDS and Kids website at www.sidsandkids.org.nz or phone us on 0800 164 455.

References:


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