


# Unsafe Infant Sleep Deaths: SDY


Twelve unsafe sleep deaths occurring among infants aged 0-7 months were reviewed by the SDY panel in 2018. Two-thirds of these deaths occurred among Black infants, and 75% of them involved infants born at term, that is after 37 weeks gestation.

The three-year average rate of infant unsafe sleep deaths has been fairly constant over the last five years in Delaware. (Figure 2) Despite more cases with documented safe sleep education in 2018—94% versus 62% in 2017—environmental factors such as the infant not sleeping in a crib or bassinette, not sleeping on his or her back, unsafe bedding or toys, and sleeping with other people were identified in 67% to 100% of cases. (Table 4, next page) Prone sleeping was more prevalent in unsafe sleep deaths compared to the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) data based on a sample of all mothers giving birth in Delaware, 21% of whom reported not placing their infant on their back to sleep. (1) These environmental factors were also found in a national study looking at unintentional suffocation deaths which reported that soft bedding was implicated in 69% of cases, most commonly when the infant was in an adult bed and in a prone position. (2)


Mother's use of tobacco and/or drugs have been increasing in prevalence among cases of unsafe sleep deaths, with 58% of infants exposed to maternal second-hand smoke and 33% exposed to drugs in utero among 2018 cases. This proportion of maternal tobacco use is over twice that reported in Delaware PRAMS between 2012-2015. (1) For additional information on unsafe sleep deaths see the 2018 data addendum.




**67%**  
of deaths involved Black infants



**100%**  
of cases had identifiable environmental risk factors



**58%**  
of mothers were smokers



**33%**  
of mothers had a drug use history

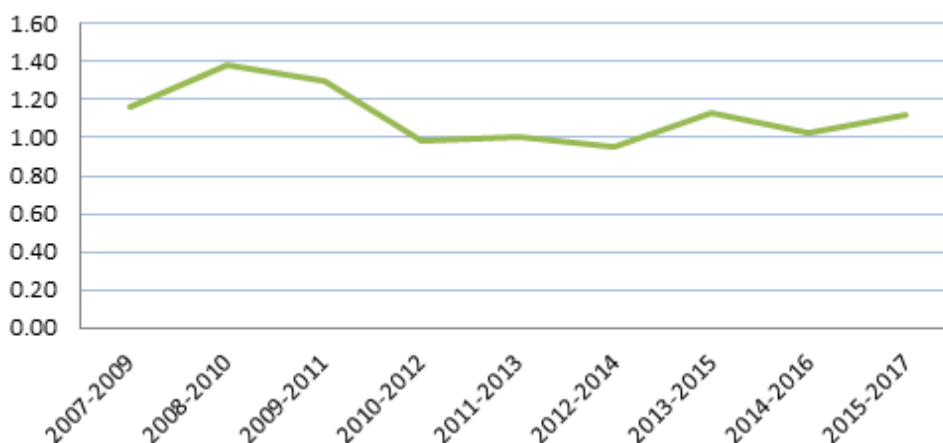


Figure 2: Rate of unsafe sleep deaths per 1,000 live births in Delaware, 3-year average

**Table 4: Sleep-related deaths, associated factors identified by the SDY panel 2016-2018 compared to PRAMS data**

	2018 (n=12)	2017 (n=12)	2016 (n=23)	PRAMS 2012- 2015 (1)
Not in a crib, bassinette, side sleeper or baby box	100%	100%	82%	--
Not sleeping on back	75%	60%	50%	21%
Unsafe bedding or toys near infant	100%	90%	83%	--
Sleeping with other people	67%	83%	65%	16%
Intrauterine drug exposure	33%	10%	*	--
Infant born drug-exposed	27%	10%	*	--
Tobacco use: mother	58%	40%	57%	24%
Adult was alcohol or drug impaired at time of death	25%	25%	26%	--

\*More than 50% of values unknown

Based on the concerning findings of increasing prevalence of maternal drug or tobacco use histories in cases of infant unsafe sleep deaths and the persistent racial disparity:

▶ The CDRC recommends that an infant safe sleep media campaign be conducted collaboratively by DFS, the Office of the Child Advocate and the CDRC to increase public awareness of unsafe sleep risk factors.

The CDRC will also conduct a multiyear analysis of unsafe sleep deaths in conjunction with the Division of Public Health (DPH) and consider community-level risk to help identify specific community partners and craft culturally appropriate messages for high-risk populations.

(1) Hussaini, SK. Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System Consolidated Report 2012-2015. Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health. July 2018.

(2) Erck Lambert AB, et al. Sleep-related infant suffocation deaths attributable to soft bedding, overlay, and wedging. Pediatrics 2019; e20183408.