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Researchers Find Another Clue to the Mystery of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Local nonprofit SIDS Resources Inc. promotes safe practices to reduce the risk of the syndrome

SAINT LOUIS, Mo. – February 4, 2010– Groundbreaking research into the causes of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) reinforces the need for parents of infants to follow safe sleep recommendations, according to St. Louis-based nonprofit SIDS Resources Inc.

Doctors at Children’s Hospital in Boston have new evidence that low serotonin levels may play a role in Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. A study published in the February 3rd issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association details the results of the new research. In the study, babies who had succumbed to SIDS had 25 percent less serotonin in their lower brainstem and 22 percent lower levels of tryptophan hydroxylase, the enzyme that makes serotonin. Levels of binding to the serotonin receptors were 50 percent lower in the SIDS babies, signifying that a serotonin defect in the brainstem was most likely involved in the death of these babies.

This research re-emphasizes safe sleep and other recommendations to reduce the risk of SIDS among infants, according to Lori Behrens, executive director of SIDS Resources.

“Since we do not have a screening test yet for low serotonin, we must assume all babies are potentially at risk,” Behrens said.

For vulnerable babies or those with low serotonin levels, re-breathing carbon dioxide (exhaled air) and overheating during sleep can be fatal. Parents need to do all they can to make sure their baby is ALWAYS placed to sleep on his or her back and in a safe place.

Safe sleep recommendations include:

Follow the ABC's of safe sleep for your baby: Babies must always sleep Alone, on their Backs, in their Cribs (for night time and nap time). Babies should not be exposed to cigarette smoke. Additionally, make sure the crib mattress is firm, and there should be no soft items, including bumper pads, pillows and stuffed animals, in the crib. Breastfeed your baby. Room sharing is good, however babies should never share a sleep surface or sleep area with any other child or adult. Using pacifiers during sleep has shown to be protective against sudden infant death.

SIDS Resources, Inc. is the only non-profit organization in Missouri that provides supportive services to families and professionals who have been affected by sudden infant death. In addition, SIDS Resources provides community and professional education regarding vital risk reduction messages and information on safe sleep for babies to all caregivers of infants and professionals who interact with these caregivers.

Sudden infant death affects about 4,000 babies each year in the US, and about 100 each year in the state of Missouri.

For more information, call 314-822-2323 or 800-421-3511; also please visit our website at www.sidsresources.org.

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