



news

Lisa Goodman, *Public Information Officer*  
Phone: 541-706-5989 | Cell: 541-241-0467  
[lngoodman@stcharleshealthcare.org](mailto:lngoodman@stcharleshealthcare.org)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | May 22, 2019

### **Sleep-related infant deaths in Deschutes County trend upward**

*Central Oregon health care providers, public health departments, encourage safe sleep practices*

BEND, Ore. – Central Oregon health care providers and public health departments are working together to raise awareness of safe sleep practices in response to troubling data that suggest the number of infants dying while sleeping is on the rise.

Between 2012 and 2017, 14 Deschutes County children died by suffocation or strangulation while sleeping, according to statistics provided by the state of Oregon. Five of those deaths occurred in 2016 alone, compared to one death in 2012.

The Deschutes County Child Fatality Review—a team of multidisciplinary community agencies that convene twice a year to identify trends and possible interventions—was motivated by the concerning rise in sleep-related infant deaths to create awareness of the problem.

Spearheaded by KIDS Center and St. Charles Health System, a collaborative effort has begun to more proactively share information about safe sleep practices on social media channels and in clinics through the end of June. Summit Medical Group Oregon, Central Oregon Pediatric Associates (COPA), Mosaic Medical and public health departments in Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties are also participating.

Dr. Nancy Heavilin, a pediatrician and KIDS Center's medical director, said the number of infant deaths is a sobering reminder of the importance of safe sleep practices.

"In reviewing the data, it became clear our community needs to talk more about how to safely prepare a baby for sleep," she said. "With proper education, fatal circumstances can be prevented."

The leading cause of death for infants 1 month to 1 year old is Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID), which includes sleep-related deaths and SIDS, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Dr. Logan Clausen, chief medical officer at COPA, said more than 95 percent of SIDS cases are associated with one or more risk factors. The most common risk factors for babies are sleeping on a soft surface, sleeping on their stomach and exposure to parental smoking. Premature babies and low birth weight babies are also at higher risk, as are those who sleep in the same bed as their parents.

"The safest way for babies to sleep is on their back on a firm mattress without any crib bumpers, stuffed animals, thick blankets or pillows in the sleeping area," Clausen said. "Exposure to any second-hand smoke should also be limited."

The best way to prevent SUID is to:

1. Put babies to sleep on their back. When they're too young to turn themselves over, this is the safest way to sleep.
2. Put them to sleep in the same room as their caretaker, but in their own space.
3. Use a firm, flat mattress.
4. Keep the sleep surface clutter-free (skip the bumpers, blankets, pillows and toys.)

Dr. Brooks Booker, a pediatrician at Summit Medical Group Oregon, added, "Be sure to schedule and go to all well-child visits. Your baby will receive important immunizations at these doctor visits. Recent evidence suggests that immunizations may have a protective effect against SIDS."

For more information about how to help babies sleep safely, visit [HealthyChildren.org/SafeSleep](https://www.HealthyChildren.org/SafeSleep).

**About St. Charles Health System**

St. Charles Health System, Inc., headquartered in Bend, Ore., owns and operates St. Charles Bend, Madras, Prineville and Redmond. It also owns family care clinics in Bend, Madras, Prineville, Redmond and Sisters. St. Charles is a private, not-for-profit Oregon corporation and is the largest employer in Central Oregon with more than 4,200 caregivers. In addition, there are more than 350 active medical staff members and nearly 200 visiting medical staff members who partner with the health system to provide a wide range of care and service to our communities.

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