

Can Vaccines Cause SIDS?

By Lydia Greene, Back to the Vax

A popular anti-vaxxer has a heartbreaking tale she attributes to vaccines. She claims that she put her child to bed a couple of days after her routine vaccinations and that her daughter died in her sleep as a result. Her story is very compelling and it strikes at the heart of any parent. However, the evidence does not indicate that vaccines caused the infant's untimely death. The evidence of the case is that the child tragically died of unsafe sleeping circumstances.

The infant was sleeping beside her and at some point, apparently, ended up on her stomach. During the autopsy, they found that the infant had creases in the skin on her face from a blanket and a pooling of blood on the front of her body, which indicated she died while face down. To spare the parent the guilt of responsibility, they classed it as undetermined (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or SIDS) during the report. When the parent contested the cause of death and asked for an inquiry, they formally changed it to positional asphyxia (suffocation due to sleeping position). True SIDS is rare, and there are many things we can do to ensure that infants are sleeping safely. I will include references so you are informed on how best to protect your infant from a similar fate.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT SIDS IS AND IS NOT

SIDS stands for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. It occurs in infants under 12 months of age, and although science is getting close to understanding why it happens, we are still not quite sure. The Boston Children's Hospital states that "While the cause of SIDS is unknown, many clinicians and researchers believe that SIDS is associated with problems in the ability of the baby to arouse from sleep, to detect low levels of oxygen, or a buildup of carbon dioxide in the blood." It is not accidental suffocation. SIDS is a diagnosis of exclusion, including the exclusion of accidental suffocation. This is why safe sleeping habits are so important.



WHAT DO THE DATA AND RESEARCH SAY ON SIDS AND VACCINATION?

Well, there are a few studies that demonstrate no association between SIDS and vaccination, and a study that shows vaccinated babies have a lower risk of SIDS. There is a study from Sweden (Lindgren et al. 1997) I refer to. In the 1980s, parents in Sweden became concerned that SIDS was caused by infant DTP vaccination. For a few years, Sweden stopped vaccinating infants for DTP. This resulted in children getting pertussis at a much higher rate, and in infants, pertussis is quite dangerous. There was no decrease in SIDS rates.

What did decrease SIDS rates was a change in recommendations like the Back to Sleep campaign (a campaign that encouraged parents to place their infant on their backs to sleep) and other recommendations. Another study (Vennemann et al. 2007) demonstrates lower SIDS rates in vaccinated babies by half. They have also done studies that demonstrate there is no relationship between the occurrence of SIDS and the timing of vaccination. This study shows that occurrences appear to be random in timing (Brotherton et al. 2005). With random occurrences we will see that on occasion SIDS will occur after vaccination, but the correlation does not indicate causation. Parents want to do everything they can to lower SIDS risk, but avoiding vital childhood vaccinations is not the way.

Alone, Back, Crib



For current guidelines on safe sleep visit the AAP website (www.aap.org).



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