

What do These Things Have in Common: An Epidemic of Baby Deaths in 1890, An Ambassador's Sudden Illness, Swamp Gas, and Old Mattresses?

The Answer Could Save Your Baby's Life!

All of these are clues which have brought scientists to the startling answer to the question, "Why do babies die of SIDS?"

For unknown reasons, parents of healthy babies wake only to find to their horror, their babies have died in the night. This was called Crib Death in the U.S.A., or Cot Death in the U.K. It is now called by the acronym SIDS for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Little is known of this tragic malady except for statistics:

- SIDS is more common in babies from lower socio-economic classes.
- A second-born child is twice as likely to die from it as a first-born.
- A third-born child is even more likely to die from SIDS.
- More cases occur in the winter months.
- A higher percentage of babies die from SIDS while sleeping in their parent's bed than in their cribs.
- The incidence of SIDS deaths is higher in Day Care Centers.
- SIDS usually strikes infants between the ages of 1 month to 1 year.
- 73% of babies who died from SIDS were found sleeping on their stomachs.

It was a New Zealand pediatrician who discovered this last statistic while questioning the mothers of SIDS babies. Using this statistic alone, he recommended infants be put to sleep on their backs instead of their stomachs.

This works beyond a doubt. Countries who have adopted this "Back to Sleep" recommendation have seen a 38% drop in the rate of SIDS. The problem with this recommendation:

1. No one knew why this works and,
2. After 5 months of age most babies can roll over, putting themselves at risk.

Clues to a Present Epidemic from a Past One

In Italy in the 1890's more than one thousand babies died in a mysterious epidemic.

A green pigment called Paris Green was all the rage at that time and was used extensively in fabrics in Italian homes. This pigment was made from a chemical process which contained arsenic. Arsenic, when in contact with mold or mildew produces a heavier-than-air gas called arsine. This gas collected on the floors where the Italian babies crawled. They died without outward symptoms.

60 years later, in 1955 this knowledge helped diagnose the sudden illness of the American Ambassador to Italy, Claire Booth Luce. She became seriously ill while sleeping in her room at the embassy. She was suffering from arsine poisoning. Mildew feeding on arsenic in her wallpaper's paste and ceiling paint had created the gas which made her seriously ill, ending her career.

In 1989 an English chemist, Dr. Barry Richardson studied the mattresses on which 200 infants had died of SIDS. He was searching for gasses thought to be causing these deaths.

Being a renowned chemist with 247 published scientific papers to his credit; Dr. Richardson knew mildew and mold feeding on chemicals often produces gasses. The most common being ammonia created from microbes feeding on nitrogen.

Phosphorus is a common element. Its gas, called phosphine is commonly created in swamps by microbes feeding on the phosphorus found there. This gas sometimes is ignited by methane rising from the swamp and creates a phenomenon known as "swamp fires."

The suspected gasses in the SIDS deaths were; arsine from arsenic, phosphine from phosphorus, and stibine from the element antimony.

The lethal effects of arsine are well known due to the disastrous epidemic in Italy.

Phosphine has properties similar to mustard gas. The Technology Transfer Network Air Toxics Website of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says of phosphine, "Phosphine is used as an insecticide for the fumigation of grains, animal feed, and leaf-stored tobacco. Acute (short-term) inhalation exposure to phosphine may cause headaches, dizziness, fatigue,

drowsiness, burning substernal pain, nausea, vomiting, cough, labored breathing, chest tightness, pulmonary irritation, pulmonary edema, and tremors in humans.”

The U.S. Dept. of Labor’s website lists the symptoms of stibine as: “Headaches; weakness; nausea, abdominal pain; lumbar pain; hemoglobinuria, hematuria; hemolytic anemia; jaundice; lung irritation.” The Health effects: “Acute Systemic Toxicity.”

An Idea + A Simple Invention = Lives Saved

In 1986 Dr. J. T. Sprott, a New Zealand Chemist, suggested SIDS deaths were caused by poisoning from gasses which were generated from chemicals in the babies’ mattresses. He developed a mattress cover which is free of the suspected chemicals and impermeable to gasses. Although he was ridiculed for his lack of scientific data and his lack of “blind studies,” NO BABIES who have slept with their mattresses covered with the cover Dr. Sprott developed have died in New Zealand.

Finally an Explanation for the Statistics!

Mildew and mold need two things to thrive: warmth and moisture. Both are found in abundance in crib mattresses with the infants supplying both. The longer a mattress is in use the more time fungus spores and microbes have to take hold and grow.

Modern mattresses, usually made of polyvinyl chloride burn readily and break down into their original components, releasing gasses. This is called out-gassing. Arsenic, antimony, and phosphorus, along with even more chemicals are added to mattresses to slow this breakdown and as a fire retardant.

Dr. Sprott, Dr. Richardson and other scientists surmised that molds and mildew in the infant’s mattresses were feeding on the added chemicals causing the formation of toxic gasses. The babies were breathing in these gasses. Not being able to move away or lift themselves, they died.

This explains why:

- SIDS is more common in babies from lower socio-economic classes. **Poorer families often use previously used mattresses. The longer a mattress has been in use, the**

- more time mold and mildew have to develop and feed on the chemicals in these mattresses.***
- Second and third-born children are twice as likely to die from SIDS as a first-born. ***Again, the same mattress often is used for subsequent babies. Prolonged use creates more density of mold.***
 - More cases occur in the winter months. ***Closed houses with less ventilation and high humidity are the perfect environment for molds and mildew.***
 - A higher percentage of babies die from SIDS while sleeping in their parent's bed than in their cribs. ***The parent's pillows and their mattress have the same properties as the crib mattresses. These added chemicals in pillows and mattresses have been linked to illnesses in adults also. (See our special report: Is Your Bed Making You Sick?)***
 - The incidence of SIDS death is higher in Day Care Centers. ***Again, mattresses used for a long time.***
 - SIDS usually strikes infants between the ages of 1 month to 1 year. ***Newborns are often in bassinets, which are only used for a short period. Older babies are able to move around and stand up to get away from these heavy gasses.***
 - 73% of babies who died from SIDS were found sleeping on their stomachs. ***Stibine and arsine are very heavy gasses. Sleeping on their stomachs puts the infants' faces directly in the trapped gasses. Putting them on their backs lessens the exposure, but does not eliminate it.***

Dr. Richardson's research on the 200 SIDS related mattresses released to him by local coroners showed every mattress infected by the *Scopulariopsis brevicaulis* fungus from the babies' sweat and other body moisture. Every mattress had at least one of the chemicals, phosphorus, antimony and arsenic. He found also that 95% of these mattresses had been used by a previous baby.

Why isn't this shouted from the rooftops?

Critics of Richardson's theory argue that there has been no controlled study on this subject so therefore there is no scientific evidence backing it up. Dr. Richardson used newspapers and television to warn of his findings before he published a paper on it. This led to his being accused of unscientific behavior, i.e. "unnecessarily frightening mothers."

Dr. Sprott also found himself at odds with the scientific community for much the same reasons. He blatantly claimed his protective covering prevented SIDS. This infuriated the medical establishments.

As a rebuttal: The use of phosphorus and antimony as fire retardants in mattresses has not been scientifically proven to be safe, especially for infants.

The answer to the accusation of no controlled studies: No ethical person in his right mind would use infants as guinea pigs in a controlled study of this subject. The proof, as with the proof of the benefits of the "Back to Sleep" campaign, comes with time.

How Can You Protect Your Baby?

No matter what controversy surrounds this theory, no matter if the theory is untested, if is wrong, or if there is something else in these mattresses causing these deaths, the action for a responsible parent to take is clear:

- Put infants to sleep on their backs.
- Use a new mattress when possible and cover your baby's mattress with a gas impermeable covering which does not have or was not manufactured with the use of the toxic-gas producing chemicals. Polyethylene is such a material. Used in thick sheets it won't cause suffocation or overheating. Wrap it securely around the mattress, being sure to leave space in the underside to ventilate the gasses safely downwards.
- Use organic, chemical free bedding made from natural fibers. Organic wool is naturally fire resistant and therefore has no added chemicals. It wicks moisture away from the body where it evaporates. This causes a dry environment resistant to molds, mildew, and dust mites. Use organic wool for bedding whenever possible.
- Write your congressperson, and others in authority to lobby to eliminate the addition of chemicals to crib mattresses.

Whether Dr. Richardson is right or not, these steps will cause no harm to your precious baby, and may just save his life.

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