

# News Release

**Date:** October 12, 2021

**Contact:** Sunny Petit, Oregon Department of Human Services Press Secretary,  
503-716-2781

## **Title: Oregon takes action to prevent sleep-related infant deaths by honoring Safe Sleep Awareness Month**

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(Salem) –

October is Safe Sleep and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) Awareness Month. Oregon Health Authority estimates nearly 40 infants in the state die in their sleep each year. Some of these deaths are preventable. [Recently enacted legislation](#) banning the manufacturing and sale of crib-bumpers in the state hopes to make an impact, and a cross-agency workgroup is focused on educating caregivers.

Oregon’s cross-agency safe sleep workgroup launched in 2020 and has been working to build strategies as well as legislation, such as the crib-bumper ban, to address these preventable deaths.

“Anytime a child dies, it is a tragic event that impacts family, friends, and the broader community,” said Child Welfare Division Director Rebecca Jones Gaston. “As we are building up a system of prevention through the Child Welfare Division [Vision for Transformation](#), if there is anything that can be done to stop a tragedy from happening in the first place, we want to make that a focus. Working with partners across systems creates better prevention education and we are honored to be part of this movement.”

Why focus on crib bumpers?

According to workgroup member and expert Dr. Ben Hoffman, a pediatrician and Medical Director of the Tom Sargent Safety Center at Oregon Health and Science University, regulations changed crib standards in 2011, which have made bumpers unnecessary. Now, crib slats are placed closer together to decrease the potential for strangulation.

“Our research with mothers of infants has found that the primary reason that parents purchase crib bumpers are that they are cute and parents believe that the crib bumpers will prevent serious injury, largely from head trauma and limb entrapments,” Hoffman testified to the Legislature. But the death risk associated with bumpers is much higher. Dr. Hoffman also cited [data in his testimony](#)

showing Oregon has a 50 percent higher rate of accidental suffocation deaths in infants than that of the overall U.S.

Adding to the local efforts on community education, the Child Welfare Division has recently introduced newly enhanced safe sleep training and education for all staff, as well as a [“self-study” publicly available](#) for community partners working with families and infants.

Some important tips for those caring for infants:

- Always put a baby on its back to sleep.
- Remove soft fluffy bedding, pillows, stuffed toys and bumper pads from your baby’s sleep area.
- Avoid placing your baby to sleep on soft things like couches or upholstered chairs, waterbeds, beanbag chairs, quilts or comforters.
- Avoid overheating or head-covering.
- Use a pacifier (to help decrease the risk of SIDS).
- If using alcohol or drugs, have a sober designated caregiver who can ensure the safety of infants in the household.
- If you smoke, do it outside as indoor smoke increases risks for infants.
- Caregiver exhaustion is normal when caring for infants. Many resources exist to help connect caregivers with support such as Relief Nurseries and the Parents Anonymous of Oregon® Parent Helpline at 503-258-4416.
- Contact 211info (call 211 or email [help@211info.org](mailto:help@211info.org)) for additional resources around housing, health care, food and childcare.
- More information and safe sleep practices in multiple languages are available on the [Doernbecher Safe Sleep webpage](#).

The workgroup includes membership representing eight different family-serving agencies from across the state, including Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Department of Education, Oregon Department of Human Services Child Welfare Division, Multnomah County Public Health, Oregon Health and Science University, NW Portland Area Indian Health Board, Legacy Health and Oregon Early Learning Division.

### **About the ODHS Child Welfare Division**

The Oregon Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Division is committed to transforming itself to better support the individual needs of families and to best serve Oregon’s children and young people. Report child abuse to the Oregon Child

Abuse Hotline by calling 1-855-503-SAFE (7233). This toll-free number allows you to report abuse of any child or adult to the Oregon Department of Human Services, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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