

SANTA FE–For first time parents, everything is new; everything is a first, and everything is a milestone. Baby's first meal, first crawl, first step and on and on. They're all terrific, but what I also remember about becoming a new father was my first worries, the wide ranging worries from sniffles, to keeping my child safe to paying for college.

One of the scariest things about having a newborn is one of the hardest to comprehend: unexpected death. Each year more than 4,000 infants die suddenly of no obvious cause in the United States.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about half of these events are due to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), which is the leading cause of death among infants aged 1 to 12 months.

Often, an autopsy alone cannot explain these deaths without investigating the scene and reviewing the infant's medical history. Doctors and researchers don't know the exact causes of SIDS. However, research shows that parents and caregivers can take to reduce the risk of happening.

The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) reports 94 SIDS deaths over the last five years. It's why NMDOH promotes Safe Sleep, a public education campaign. The campaign, now in its 20th year, provides answers about SIDS to both health providers and parents. Also, October is SIDS Awareness Month, a time where as much awareness about SIDS is generated as possible by the medical community.

New studies and research suggest that some SIDS babies are born with brain abnormalities

that make them susceptible to SIDS as infants. These studies have shown that many SIDSinfants have abnormalities in the portion of their brain that controls breathing and waking during sleep. Babies born with other brain or body defects may also be more prone to sudden death. Other studies have suggested that lower serotonin levels may also play a role in SIDS.

While the cause is still unclear, NMDOH and the CDC offer the following actions to help reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death:

• Always place babies on their backs to sleep for every sleep.

• Use a firm sleep surface, such as a mattress in a safety-approved crib, covered by a fitted sheet.

• Have the baby share your room, not your bed. Your baby should not sleep in an adult bed, on a couch, or on a chair alone, with you, or with anyone else.

• Keep soft objects such as pillows and loose bedding out of your baby’s sleep area.

• Do not smoke during pregnancy or around the baby because these are important risk factors for SIDS. The risk of SIDSis even stronger when a baby shares a bed with a smoker. To reduce risk, do not smoke during pregnancy, and do not smoke or allow smoking around your baby. For help in quitting, call the quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) and 1-855-DEJELO-YA (1-855-335-3569).