



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER  
401 E. Street, SW – 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20024

**2017 Overview of Infant Sleeping Deaths That Occurred  
in the District of Columbia by Jurisdiction of Residence**

Report Date: September 23, 2018

Although a death of an infant may occur in the DC, the infant's place of residence can be anywhere in the world. For the purpose of this annual report, infant deaths are defined as babies that are age one year old or less at the time of death. This report will identify the residential jurisdiction of the infant by using the parental residence at the time of the infant's death. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using the term bed-sharing instead of the term co-sleeping due the ability to misconstrue the sleeping arrangement. Co-sleeping refers to when a parent and infant sleep in close proximity to each other. While bed-sharing refers to a specific type of co-sleeping in which the infant is sleeping on the same surface as another person. This report includes any infant deaths in which bed-sharing or co-sleeping in the same bed was related to the cause of death.<sup>1</sup>

Co-sleeping/Bedsharing

There were a total of 15 co-sleeping/bed-sharing infant fatalities that were certified with a Manner of Death as “**Undetermined**” or “**Accident**” in calendar year 2017. These accidental infant fatalities were caused by Asphyxia due to overlay (asphyxia due to overlay was the result of a co-sleeping environment). Of the 15 deaths due to bedsharing, ten had parents that were residents of the District of Columbia, and four had parents that lived outside of the District (Maryland). Although the numbers are low, there were more sleeping deaths in wards seven eight than the other six wards. Within this review period, there were no co-sleeping/bedsharing fatalities where the parental residence was in the DC wards 2 or 3.

Unsafe sleeping environment or Inappropriate bedding

Although “*Unsafe sleeping environment*” and “*Inappropriate bedding*” are classified independently in the circumstances and cause of death, these classifications are very similar as it relates to the sleeping environment of the infant. For example, an adult bed is identified by the DC Medical Examiner as an unsafe sleeping environment, yet it is also known as inappropriate bedding for an infant.

There were **eight** cases in 2017 where the infant died as a result of unsafe sleeping or inappropriate bedding, yet was NOT attributed to co-sleeping or bed-sharing based on the investigation. With the exception of 3 cases, all of these cases had a Manner of Death of “Undetermined.”

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<sup>1</sup> SIDS and Other Sleep-Related Infant Deaths: Evidence Base for 2016 Updated Recommendations for a Safe Infant Sleeping Environment. Rachel Y. Moon, TASK FORCE ON SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME. Pediatrics Oct 2016, e20162940; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2016-2940



<b>Infant Deaths by Cause of Death, Manner of Death and Contributing Factors</b>				
<b>Cause of Death</b>	<b>Manner</b>	<b>Co-sleeping/ Bed-sharing</b>	<b>Unsafe Sleep Environment/ Inappropriate Bedding</b>	<b>Total</b>
Asphyxia	Accident	7	3	<b>10</b>
Asphyxia	Undetermined	1	0	<b>1</b>
SUID	Undetermined	2	1	<b>3</b>
Undetermined	Undetermined	5	4	<b>9</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>23</b>

