



**Memo: New Study Demonstrates Lack of Adherence to Safe Sleep Guidelines in Child Product Retail and Advertisement**

*Safe Sleep Guideline Adherence in Nationwide Marketing of Infant Cribs and Products, By Matthew Kreth, MD, FAAP, Tammy Shikany, MAE, RRT, Claire Lenker, LCSW, CCM, R. Bradley Troxler, MD, FAAP*

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## Overview

A recent study by investigators from University of Alabama found that advertisements do not adhere to American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) safe sleep guidelines. Of the 1758 retail crib displays in-person or online that they looked into, only half represented the AAP recommendations. The study looked into both crib manufacturers and retail establishments through online, print, and in-person mediums. As mentioned in their study, “35% of current advertisements depict nonadherent, unsafe sleep environments” and these environments vary greatly based on the racial and ethnic groups represented in the advertisements (Kreth et.al, 2016, p.1). The authors recommend that pediatric and public health care providers continue efforts to correct these representations, but that retailers need to take more responsibility to promote safe sleep environments for all children regardless of race or ethnicity.

## Key Points of Study

This study is the first done on marketing and advertisement of cribs since the new AAP safe sleep guidelines in 2011, making it critical information for Kids In Danger (KID) and other organizations working to promote child product safety.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), SIDS/SUID “remains the leading cause of infant mortality in the United States for children 1 month to 1 year of age” (Kreth et.al, 2016, p. 2). The researchers note that although information about safe sleep is out there and that pediatricians understand it well, “the total amount of time spent with a primary care provider during a well child visit is brief compared with the amount of time parents are exposed to advertising for infant products” (Kreth et.al, 2016, p.2). This fact makes it imperative that retailers promote correct safe sleep guidelines in their advertisements, however, as shown by this study, that is done only about 50 percent of the time.

The study showed that the 47.1 percent of pediatrician meetings with parents were between 11 and 20 minutes long (Kreth et.al, 2016, p.2). This amount of time is incredibly short compared to the constant advertising amount of time that parents spend searching for child products in a retail stores or online. The National Action Partnership to Promote Safe Sleep stated that the societal pressure to buy what is seen in stores is normative and hard for parents to resist (Kreth et.al, 2016, p.2). For this reason, when parents are looking for safe sleep products, it is extremely difficult to make decisions based on accurate safe sleep knowledge.

The researchers looked into different cohorts of print advertisements. Of the 1893 total viewed, 767 were from the 1991–1992 cohort, 698 were from the 2010–2011 cohort, and 428 were from the 2015–2016 cohort (Kreth et.al, 2016, p.3). They found that, overall, the images depicting safe sleep standards increased overtime (Kreth et.al, 2016, p.3).

While analyzing the print ads, investigators found that white children were “far more likely” to be depicted in safe sleep conditions than minority children (Kreth et.al, 106, p.3). They found that, “Out of the 1893 advertisements reviewed, no children identified from underrepresented minorities were featured in any guideline-adherent sleep advertisements” (Kreth et.al, 2016, p.3). Nonwhite children were shown in 18.5% of advertisements, however, they were all depicted in unsafe sleep environments (Kreth et.al, 2016, p.3). This is particularly concerning because the rates of death by SIDS/SUID are more than doubled for African-Americans than whites.

Large retail stores did have 100 percent compliance with the new guidelines. Investigators found this particularly interesting, because these large retailers did a better job adhering to guidelines than baby-specific stores.

“The inclusion of bumper pads, loose bedding, and soft objects in the crib were the most common reasons for displays to be nonadherent. In physical stores, 95.8% of nonadherent cribs had loose bedding included in the display” (Kreth et.al, 2016, p.5). If these items were removed from stores, it would make it so that the majority of retail stores displayed correct information.

A 2015 study in *Pediatrics* found that more than half of mothers interviewed used a form on loose bedding in their infant’s cribs (Kreth et.al, 2016, p.6). Investigators note that the heavy use of loose bedding in advertisements and retail displays contribute to this high number. They recommend that loose bedding needs to be the target of advocacy campaigns.

## Overall Findings

- Almost 40% of current advertisements featuring sleep in children <1 year of age continue to show unsafe sleep environments as defined by the AAP and 60% of these advertisements depict infants sleeping in non-supine positions.
- Almost 50% of all online and in-store crib displays featured items specifically mentioned by the AAP as not recommended in a safe sleep environment.
- The presence of bumper pads in the in-person or online advertised cribs (70.2% of nonadherent cribs) was the most common reason for guideline nonadherence, followed by inclusion of loose bedding (55.7% of nonadherent cribs), and soft objects in the crib (12.9% of nonadherent cribs).
- Parents are likely to hear about safe sleep during doctor appointments, but as one of more than 20 recommended topics to be discussed in early visits, this discussion can be easily overshadowed by what parents see when shopping for cribs or reading parent-oriented magazines.
- No children from underrepresented minority groups were shown in safe sleep environments, even though these groups have high incidence of SIDS/SUID.
- Overall, 35% of current advertisements depict nonadherent, unsafe sleep environments.

## Why This is Important for KID

This information is imperative to the work KID does on a daily basis. This study comments directly on how a safe sleep guideline is not being followed by many major child product retail stores. KID must advocate on behalf of parents to make sure that federal regulations and pediatrician guidelines are enforced in retail stores and marketing campaigns.

This information is also crucial because it is evident that minorities are not being represented in safe sleep environments. As an organization, KID needs to continue to provide educational materials for minority groups that are not receiving the critical information from other sources. The great disparity in the marketing campaigns is something that KID does not take lightly and will work to change.

## Resources and References

Kreth, M., Shikany, T., Lenker, C., Troxler, B. (2016). Safe Sleep Guideline Adherence in Nationwide Marketing of Infant Cribs and Products. *Pediatrics*, 139(1). doi: 10.1542/peds.2016-1729.

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