



## News Articles, Breastfeeding, Fetus/Newborn Infant, SIDS

### Study: Breastfeeding for at least 2 months decreases risk of SIDS

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Breastfeeding for at least two months could cut the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) nearly in half, according to a new study.

"Even if mothers are unable to exclusively breastfeed, they can feel reassured that any breastfeeding provides protection against SIDS to their infants," authors wrote in the study "Duration of Breastfeeding and Risk of SIDS: An Individual Participant Data (IPD) Meta-analysis" (Thompson JMD, et al. *Pediatrics*. Oct. 30, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-1324>).

AAP policies note that **breastfeeding** has been linked to lower rates of **SIDS**. The Academy recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continuation until the child is at least 1 year.

Rachel Y. Moon, M.D., FAAP, lead author of the AAP SIDS policy, was among the researchers involved in this new study that set out to look at how long a mother needs to breastfeed to protect her baby and the impact of breastfeeding exclusively. The team looked at eight studies from around the world involving 2,267 SIDS cases and 6,837 control infants.

Univariate analysis found breastfeeding had a protective effect against SIDS even for small amounts of time, but the multivariable analysis showed the effect began at two months and increased over time. Adjusted odds ratios were 0.91 for those breastfed less than two months, 0.6 for those breastfed two to four months, 0.4 for four to six months and 0.36 for over six months.

"It is thus important that public health messages about SIDS risk reduction emphasize that breastfeeding, if it is to be protective, must continue for at least 2 months," authors wrote.

Breastfeeding exclusively did not provide more protection than partial breastfeeding, despite the team's previous research to the contrary.

Authors said it was unclear why breastfeeding protected infants from SIDS but discussed several possibilities, including better arousal from sleep in breastfed babies. Breast milk also boosts infants' immune systems and supports their brain development.

Data from 2007 showed roughly 89% of infants in the European Union, 85% in New Zealand, 77% in the United Kingdom, 75% in the U.S. and 42% in Ireland had ever been breastfed. The World Health Organization has set a target of half of infants being exclusively breastfed for at least six months by 2025.

"Further increases in breastfeeding rates will result in lower infant mortality as a whole," authors wrote, "and decreases in SIDS rates, specifically."

#### Resources

- [AAP breastfeeding webpage, including practice tools and educational materials for pediatricians and parents](#)
- [Safe to Sleep campaign](#)
- [Information for parents from the Healthy Children website on SIDS](#)
- [Information for parents from the Healthy Children website on breastfeeding](#)