

Dear Editor,

In the last 6 months the idea of babies sleeping in cardboard boxes has taken the nation by storm. Several states have implemented programs to provide parents with these boxes at birth. The box concept originated in Finland over 75 years ago where cardboard boxes filled with baby items were given to parents as an incentive to enter early prenatal care. The box could also be used as an infant sleep location once the baby items were removed. Because infant mortality in Finland is among the lowest in the world, areas with high infant mortality are hoping the box will be the key to reducing infant death. As such, several US companies have developed boxes under the assumption they offer a safe alternative for infant sleep.



It is important to note, international infant mortality rates, including US rates, have been on the decline since the 1940's. Improved healthcare, including immunizations and prenatal care, has contributed to the decline. Those promoting cardboard boxes fail to recognize differences in healthcare systems. For example, Finland has universal healthcare and offers paid maternity and paternity leave. Finland has not released any information on the impact of the boxes as a sleep location alone.

National organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development have raised some concerns regarding the boxes. To date, there are no safety standards for cardboard boxes as infant sleep locations. Many parents assume that because a product is allowed to be sold, it must be safe. However, the boxes on the market are not subject to any Consumer Product Safety Commission safety standards. Additional concerns about using a box for infant sleep include:

- Potential poor air flow
- May tip over if placed on an unstable surface
- Infant weight and age limits are higher than those for a safety-approved bassinet, yet boxes for sale have a smaller sleep surface
- Cardboard is a flammable material
- Structural damage due to moisture or wear and tear
- Access to baby by pets and animals
- Rodents and roaches are attracted to cardboard

Although these boxes are promoted as being "safe", there is no data to support their safety. Until box safety is determined, parents and caregivers should consider the evidence-based recommendations put forth by the American Academy of Pediatrics:

- Infants should sleep in a safety-approved crib, portable crib or bassinet.
- Place infants on their back to sleep (supine) for every sleep period until they are 1 year of age. This position does not increase the risk of choking and aspiration.
- Use a firm sleep surface.
- Place infants to sleep in the same room where you sleep. Infants should sleep close to the parents' bed but on a separate sleep surface designed for infants, ideally for the first year, but at least for the first six months.
- Keep soft objects and loose bedding out of the infant's sleep area.

- Consider offering a pacifier (after breastfeeding has been firmly established) at naptime and bedtime.
- Breastfeed, if possible.
- Avoid smoke exposure during pregnancy and after birth.
- Avoid alcohol and illicit drug (even over the counter cold medicines that make you sleepy) use during pregnancy and after birth.
- Avoid overheating and head covering in infants.

Additional information on these recommendations and other infant sleep resources can be found at kidsks.org.

Sleep-related infant death remains a problem in Sedgwick County. While all infants are at risk, a disproportionate number of low income families are affected. Events like the Safe Sleep Community Baby Showers, hosted by the KIDS Network and Black Nurses Association, provide education and tools to help families follow the guidelines to reduce the risk of infant death. However, additional interventions are needed.

The Medical Society of Sedgwick County Safe Sleep Taskforce Committee has reviewed the available data related to cardboard boxes as infant sleep locations. Until further research becomes available supporting the safety of boxes, we recommend following the American Academy of Pediatrics safe sleep guidelines.

On behalf of the MSSC Safe Sleep Task Force,

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