

Baby Boxes: What Community Leaders Must Know

From the North Carolina Safe Infant Sleep Advisory Committee

You have likely heard of baby boxes. These are sturdy cardboard boxes with a firm mattress and a fitted sheet that are becoming a popular option to provide to parents in an effort to reduce infant mortality rates. These boxes are intended to serve as a safe sleep area when a traditional and recommended sleep area is not available. As North Carolina's Safe Infant Sleep Advisory Committee, we are dedicated to the elimination of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other sleep-related deaths, and we applaud all initiatives designed to improve the chances that babies will be placed in a safe sleep environment. However, it is important that community leaders and parents recognize that there are limitations regarding baby boxes and that these are not subject to any mandatory safety standards from the [Consumer Product Safety Commission](#). While often parents must watch a program lasting 10 to 15 minutes and take a short quiz to get a certificate of completion, there is a risk that the baby box may still be used in unsafe ways, if used at all. The American Academy of Pediatric Task Force on SIDS does not believe that there is yet enough evidence to say anything about the potential benefits or dangers of using baby boxes. These boxes are popular in Finland and credited for reducing SIDS and other sleep-related infant deaths there. However, these boxes have been utilized there since the 1930s and this means that they are well accepted and properly used within this culture. Further, there are many other reasons at play for Finland's low infant mortality rates, including universal healthcare and parental leave.

The following are factors to consider before investing in baby boxes:

Safety:

- These have not been proven acceptable or efficacious in the US setting.
- It is still key to ensure that the baby box, like all sleep spaces for infants, does not contain fluffy bedding, pillows, blankets, stuffed animals, or extra padding.
- Placing the box on an unstable surface such as a dresser, counter, or couch is dangerous. There is a potential suffocation hazard if the baby rolls into the side of the box.
- Placing the baby in the baby box on the floor may cause a tripping hazard posing a danger of someone falling on top of the baby.
- Pets can easily get into the box, and rodents and roaches are drawn to cardboard.

Utilization:

- It is unclear if North Carolina parents would find the baby box acceptable and utilize it.
- The majority of infant sleep-related deaths in North Carolina are associated with bed sharing, which is when an individual shares a sleep space with an infant. It is not clear that a baby box will help to reduce the dangers of bed sharing because most parents who bed share do not do so because there is lack of a safe space for the infant to sleep.

Cost:

- Not always cost effective - the cost of a baby box is comparable to a basic pack-n-play.
- Infants are only to sleep in the box for the first 3-4 months of life (or until they can turn over). Parents would then need to have another safe space for their infant at this time.

We understand why organizations are interested in the baby boxes, but we would suggest that community leaders thoughtfully consider whether to invest in these products. It is important to keep in mind that providing a baby box does not eliminate the need to provide counseling and education to parents and caregivers regarding how to provide a safe sleep environment. Nighttime parenting with an infant is especially challenging, and parents need support to safely navigate this critical period even if they are provided with a baby box.



Is a Baby Box Right for My Baby?
What parents need to know about baby boxes
From the North Carolina Safe Infant Sleep Advisory Committee

You may have heard of baby boxes, or maybe even received one. These are sturdy cardboard boxes with a firm mattress, a waterproof cover, and a fitted sheet that are intended to serve as a safe sleep area when a traditional and recommended sleep area, like a crib, is not available. Although these might be a good fit for families, it is important that parents understand that there are limitations regarding baby boxes and to use them safely.

The following are some things to consider regarding the use of a baby box:

- Babies should only sleep in the box for the first 3-4 months of life (or until they can turn over). After 4 months or when they can turn over, you will need another safe sleep space for your baby, such as a crib or pack-n-play.
- Make sure the baby box, like all sleep spaces for infants, does not contain any fluffy bedding, pillows, blankets, stuffed animals, or extra padding.
- The box is designed to be placed on the floor. It should not be placed on a bed, dresser, table, couch, counter, or any other unstable or high surface.

A baby box may be a great alternative for many families that need a place for their infant to sleep when used safely. For more information talk to your healthcare provider and visit SafeSleepNC.org