Parents can cut in half the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) by making sure their newborns immunizations are on schedule. That’s part of the latest recommendation issued yesterday by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) at the organization’s national meeting in Boston. As part of the updated SIDS guidelines, the group also says breast feeding and placing babies on their backs when they go to sleep will reduce the risk of infant death (the latter has been known for about twenty years).

ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross believes that the new recommendations serve as an important reminder to parents of yet another of the enormous health benefits of vaccines, especially since there is a persistent mistrust of the safety of immunizations. Writing for the Washington Post, Petula Dvorak reports on this disturbing trend and wags her finger at celebrities such as Jenny McCarthy who continually perpetuate the thoroughly debunked myth that vaccines cause autism. Adds Dr. Ross, Parents who don’t vaccinate their children are putting their babies, themselves, and the surrounding community at a greater risk of disease, and also we now learn of increasing their risk of SIDS, an often preventable tragedy.

In addition to issuing updated SIDS guidelines, the AAP also revised its 1999 policy statement on the amount of time infants and toddlers spend in front of the TV and with similar media. Though the new recommendations largely reflect the original statement, the AAP is encouraging parents to limit the amount of time that children under age 2 spend watching TV; more recent research suggests that excessive TV viewing may lead to sleep problems and delayed use of speech, they say. Instead, parents should replace this practice with more face-to-face interaction with their children or increased playtime with toys.

However, studies showing benefits to early childhood development from less TV exposure are hardly definitive. While no one can argue that when it comes to growing children, interpersonal interactions are superior to TV watching in terms of achieving milestone developments, says Dr. Ross, these recommendations also need to take into account real world situations, which means that parents are not always going to have the time to play with their kids. So, while TV watching should not be unsupervised or used as a regular baby-sitting method, the AAP experts need to realize how much of their advice is realistic, and how much will be ignored.
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