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LA LECHE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL SUPPORTS BEDSHARING FOR CERTAIN BREASTFEEDING MOTHERS

SCHAUMBURG, Illinois (May 22, 2013) – Few new mothers get enough sleep and most mothers worry about their babies sleeping safely. Research has shown that a majority of breastfeeding mothers bedshare at some point because they need more sleep and it makes breastfeeding at night easier. Many families also discover that bedsharing is enjoyable and brings them closer. Yet they often worry about the safety of bedsharing, especially when they hear strong messages in the media warning them against it.

One such warning resulted from a recent meta-analysis by Carpenter et al (2013). However, infant sleep researchers who focus on the normal behaviors of breastfeeding mothers and babies report numerous flaws in the Carpenter study, which combines and re-analyzes five older studies rather than examining any new research.

The low-risk breastfeeding, non-smoking mother who hears such anti-bedsharing messages is likely to move from her relatively safe bed to a truly unsafe sofa or recliner to breastfeed at night, putting her baby at significantly higher risk. Breastfeeding is also likely to end sooner when mothers have to get up at night to nurse. And babies who aren't breastfed have a higher risk of SIDS.

The risks of bedsharing are lower for breastfeeding mothers because they are more attuned to their babies' movements and needs and tend to sleep in a protective "cuddle curl" around their babies. In turn, their babies seek their mother's breast rather than moving into surrounding pillows and bedding.

While bedsharing is not appropriate for all families, a significant body of recent, careful research indicates that bedsharing does not result in any increased risk of SIDS when the following "Safe Sleep Seven" conditions are met:

1. Non-smoking household (including maternal smoking during pregnancy)
2. Sober and unimpaired caregivers
3. Breastfeeding mother
4. Healthy baby
5. Baby on his back
6. Baby not overheated
7. Mother and baby sharing a surface that is free of objects, indentations, or gaps that could compromise the infant's breathing.

When all of these seven conditions are in place, a baby in bed with his mother is at no greater risk of SIDS than if he's alone in a crib.

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Adult beds sometimes include suffocation, choking, or entrapment risks that can be removed in advance, which is why bedsharing should be planned rather than accidental. A prepared adult bed is safer than a sofa, soft chair, or recliner, all three of which have inherent suffocation risks.

Because bedsharing is likely to happen when mothers are exhausted, LLLI encourages *all* mothers, even those who don't meet all "Safe Sleep Seven" criteria, to plan for bedsharing by making their beds free of suffocation risks.

For more information on safe bedsharing for the breastfeeding family, see LLLI's tear-off sheet, "Safe Sleep for Breastfeeding Babies," available at l.li.org/public/profile/504. There is also a FAQ on LLLI's webpage at l.li.org/faq/cosleep.html.

For a detailed analysis of the 2013 Carpenter study, see the White Paper, "[SIDS: Risks and Realities: A Response to Recent Findings on Bedsharing and SIDS Risk](#)," developed by Sarah Ockwell-Smith, Wendy Middlemiss, Tracy Cassels, Helen Stevens, and Darcia Narvaez, available at praeclaruspress.com.

About La Leche League International

La Leche League began as a small support group near Chicago in 1956. It has become the world's leading breastfeeding advocacy organization. La Leche League International's mission is to help mothers worldwide to breastfeed through mother-to-mother support, encouragement, information, and education, and to promote a better understanding of breastfeeding as an important element in the healthy development of the baby and mother.

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