


Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS): Safer sleep requirements – Frequently Asked Question

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Begin Bright

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Why is the Department for Education amending the sleeping arrangements section of the EYFS?

The safety of our youngest children is our utmost priority and we continually monitor and review safeguarding requirements for early years settings to make sure children are kept as safe as possible.

Tragically, there have been cases of children dying from unsafe sleep practices and we need to make sure we are doing all that we can to prevent this from happening again.

It is important to provide babies and children with a safer sleep environment to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) in babies up to 12 months of age, and sudden unexpected death in childhood (SUDC) in children over 12 months of age. SIDS is the sudden unexpected death of a baby where no cause is found. In the UK, [188 babies die from SIDS every year](#). Sadly, toddlers are also at risk of suffocation when sleeping from becoming entangled in soft bedding and/or getting trapped in soft furniture.

All early years providers are required to meet the safer sleep requirements set out in the [EYFS statutory framework](#) which currently links to the [NHS safer sleep guidance](#). We are planning to update the wording in the EYFS framework so the requirements are set out directly in the framework itself and the requirements can be seen without having to link out to another place. This is due to come into effect from September 2026, subject to parliamentary and legislative process.

What are the changes you are making?

The proposed new wording to the EYFS states:

Babies and children must be placed down to sleep safely. For children under 2 years old, providers must ensure that:

- Children are placed down on their back in their own separate sleep space on a firm flat surface such as a cot, bed or mattress on the floor. Babies aged 12 months and under must only be placed to sleep in a cot. (Cots refer to: Cots, carrycots, Moses baskets, travel cots. Providers may find it useful to refer to the British Safety Standards)
- Sleep spaces should only contain a firm, flat, waterproof mattress and lightweight bedding which is firmly tucked in around the child below their shoulders to prevent head covering. Alternatively, a well fitted baby sleep bag may be used. Check the manufacturer recommendations before using a baby sleep bag.
- Where blankets are used, the baby is placed feet-to-foot at the bottom of the cot, with blankets tucked in.
- Cots must not contain extra items such as toys, pillows, extra blankets, bumpers, wedges or straps.
- Children should not get too hot or cold. The recommended room temperature for babies is 16 – 20°C.
- Children’s heads are not covered.
- Babies under six months of age must always have an adult with them in the same room for every sleep. All children must be frequently checked when sleeping.
- Children are always within sight and hearing of staff when sleeping.

Practitioners must read [NHS advice on Sudden infant death syndrome \(SIDS\) – NHS](#). More information on safer sleep guidance is available from [The Lullaby Trust](#).

When will these changes come into effect? Will Ofsted inspect on the new criteria before September 2026?

We are planning to update the wording in the EYFS in September 2026, subject to parliamentary and legislative process. We will make a further announcement once the changes come into effect. Until the changes come into effect, Ofsted will inspect according to the [current EYFS frameworks for group based providers and childminders](#), which links out to [NHS safer sleep guidance](#). Providers should already be acting in accordance with the NHS guidance.

Ofsted’s Early Years inspectors are early years professionals who have training as inspectors which covers safe sleep. The Department for Education is working with Ofsted to ensure that inspectors are prepared for the planned updated wording in the EYFS.

Does the reference to ‘Babies aged 1 year and under’ refer to babies aged 12 months and under or babies aged less than 24 months?

For the purpose of wording around safer sleep, ‘babies aged under 1 year and under’ refers to ‘babies aged 12 months and under’. In the future iteration of the EYFS, for the requirements on safe sleep we will clarify ‘babies’ to refer to those aged 12 months and under.

How do I calculate the age of a premature baby (with regards to SIDS/SUDC)?

If a baby was born prematurely (before 37 weeks) or weighing less than 2.5kg or 5.5lb, you should follow the safer sleep advice for a year from their due date, rather than when they were born. Further advice on safer sleep and premature or low birth weight babies can be found on the NHS and [The Lullaby Trust](#).

Sleep spaces

How does the Department for Education define 'cot'?

Babies aged 12 months and under must only be placed to sleep in a cot. 'Cot' refers to cots, carrycots, Moses baskets and travel cots.

Children aged over 12 months must be placed down on their back in their own separate sleep space on a clear, flat, firm surface such as a cot, bed or suitable mattress on the floor.

You may find it useful to refer to the British Safety Standards:

- **Cots, travel cots, Moses baskets and carry cots:** BS EN 716-1:2017, BS EN 1466:2014 or BS EN 1466:2023
- **Bedside cribs:** Since 2020, all bedside cribs should meet the new crib safety standard BS EN 1130:2019. This means cots should no longer have a side that fully drops down.
- **Mattresses:** BS 7177:2008+A1:2011
- **Mattresses for cots, travel cots and cribs:** BS EN 16890:2017+A1:2021
- **Sleepbags:** BS EN 16781:2018.

This list is provided for reference, you must ensure you are satisfied that your sleeping arrangements meet the EYFS requirements.

The Department for Education does not offer advice on specific products to use. Providers must ensure their arrangements and spaces for sleep meet the EYFS requirements. Providers must also take into account the individual needs of each child in their care.

Can children sleep in prams, buggies, push chairs and car seats?

Buggies, pushchairs and prams should not form the main separate sleep space for babies or children of any age.

For babies aged 12 months and under that fall asleep whilst travelling:

They must be transferred to their cot once they return to the setting. Hats and extra clothing should be removed as soon as you come indoors or enter a car, bus or train, even it means waking the baby – [Sudden infant death syndrome \(SIDS\) – NHS](#).

For children aged over 12 months that fall asleep whilst travelling:

They should, where possible, be transitioned to their own separate sleep space on a clear, flat, firm surface such as a cot, bed or suitable mattress on the floor upon return. A lie-flat pram or lie-flat pushchair should not be their main separate sleep space. Coats, hats and blankets should be adjusted to prevent overheating.

If a baby or child of any age falls asleep whilst travelling in a car seat, they must be transferred to their separate sleep space as soon as they return to the setting.

Can babies sleep in slings and carriers?

The safest place for a baby to sleep is on a firm, flat surface. This helps to keep their airway clear and open. The Lullaby Trust has guidance on how to use a sling safely if a baby falls asleep in one whilst you are travelling – [Baby slings and carriers | The Lullaby Trust](#). However, a sling or carrier should not form the main separate sleep space for a baby or child.

Can video or baby monitors be used to meet the the requirement that ‘Children are always within sight and hearing of staff when sleeping’?

Babies under six months of age must always have an adult with them in the same room for every sleep. This is stated in the [NHS guidance](#) which the EYFS currently links out to.

Children over six months of age should always be within sight and hearing of staff whilst they are sleeping. A baby monitor that allows the child(ren) to be seen and heard at all times may be used but all children must still be frequently checked when they are sleeping.

Are comforters permitted?

Sleep comforters may be used for babies and children aged over 12 months only.

What should I do if the room temperature goes above/under 16-20°C?

Providers should use their professional judgement during extreme temperatures.

Can I use a waterproof mattress cover?

A mattress with an integral waterproof PVC coating or a separate waterproof layer is acceptable. [Further advice on mattresses and bedding can be found on The Lullaby Trust's website.](#)

Can I use a sheet to cover the mattress/waterproof mattress cover?

If a cot sheet is used, it must be securely tucked in around the mattress. A fitted sheet is preferable because there is less risk of it becoming untucked and covering the face/head of the baby.

Other

What happens if a baby or child falls asleep outside? Can they still wear a hat?

Provider judgement should be used if a baby or child falls asleep wearing a hat. Evidence suggests that babies (those aged 12 months and under) are at a higher risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) if they have their heads covered. If the hat has a strap around the baby or child's neck then this must be removed. The [NHS guidance](#) states that babies should never sleep in direct sunlight.

Do blankets need to be cellular blankets?

Lightweight bedding should be used which is firmly tucked in around the child below their shoulders to prevent head covering. A cellular blanket can help to keep a baby warm whilst allowing air flow. [Further advice on mattresses and bedding can be found on The Lullaby Trust's website.](#)

Will dummies be banned under the new changes?

There are no planned changes to the use of dummies. [There is further advice on using dummies available on The Lullaby Trust's website.](#) Further advice on oral health can be found on [Help for Early Years.](#)

What should educators do if a baby rolls over in their sleep?

Once babies can move from their back to their front and back again by themselves they can find their own sleeping position. However, continue to place them on their back to sleep.

How frequently should physical checks should be carried out?

This is for the provider to determine based on their professional judgement and the individual needs of each child in their care. All children must be checked frequently whilst they are sleeping and be within sight and hearing of staff. Children under six months of age must always have an adult with them in the same room for every sleep.