

Free 'baby box' provides safety for metro Phoenix newborns

[Jamie Sheldon](#), The Republic | [azcentral.com](#) Published 9:02 a.m. MT Nov. 28, 2015 | Updated 4:12 p.m. MT Dec. 3, 2015

Mountain Park Health Center is thinking outside the box by introducing a free package to help expecting moms and families provide better care for their newborns.

Beginning Dec. 1, the center, which has clinics across the Valley, will give patients small, protective "baby boxes" filled with products that promote the safety and well-being of newborns.

But the things inside the box may not be as useful as the box itself.

According to experts at Mountain Park, [the portable boxes](#) are designed to keep infants safe in busy, low-income households under challenging living conditions.

The boxes are a result of the recently released annual report from the Arizona Department of Health Services' Child Fatality Review program.

For over 20 years, the program has gathered and reviewed research involving fatalities under the age of 18 in Arizona. The annual reports give recommendations on how to prevent further child deaths.

According to the latest report, some preventable child deaths in Arizona have increased since 2013.

An uptick in one category, Sudden Unexplained Infant Deaths, or SUID, has surprised public-health officials and pediatricians because public awareness of this syndrome has grown over the years.

SUID, also known as SIDS, is defined as the death of a healthy infant with no prior medical history.

The Child Fatality Review report found that 85 infant deaths were categorized as SUID and accounted for 10 percent of all child deaths in Arizona in 2014, a 15 percent increase from the 74 recorded in 2013.

Eighty-two of the 85 infants died in unsafe sleep settings, an increase from 65 in 2013. The Child Fatality Review team concluded that 92 percent of those deaths were preventable.

Many physicians around the Valley are becoming more aware of the increase in sleep-related deaths. Sara Bode, a pediatrician at Phoenix Children's Hospital, said child sleep-related fatalities are something that most health-care services, including Phoenix Children's, have a grasp on.

"That is something we absolutely know that we can prevent," Bode said. "We have programs in place. It is getting families into a primary-care provider."

Mountain Park Health Center is a prime example of facilities that are launching programs dedicated to providing safer living spaces for small children and infants.



(Photo: Tom Tingle/The Republic)

A baby box is being given free to all patients who are at least 35 weeks into their pregnancy. It not only contains baby tools like clothes, books and a first aid kit, but it has passed rigorous safety standards that make it a portable, accessible sleeping space for babies under 10 months old.

Many infants are exposed to factors that could contribute to an SUID fatality, said Janey Starks, marketing and engagement manager at Mountain Park.

"Our mission with this box is to make sure moms have access to the supplies and the services to make sure that their babies start their life healthy and safe," she said. "We are

hoping that it brings excitement within the community and that moms become less worried about their supplies and more about the bond with their baby.”

Many patients and their families are enthusiastic about what's in the boxes.

“I’m very excited,” said Katy Brennan, a first-time mother. "It is beyond what I thought it was going to be, and a lot of stuff in there is necessary, especially the health kit, which was on my baby list.”

Another mother is excited about the box itself.

“I would have never thought to put my baby in a box,” said Maria Jimenez, a mother of seven. “It is something that I can see as very beneficial because it’s something very safe for the baby, and I can go from room to room and have the baby with me instead of being in one part of the house and the baby is in another. It’s very generous gift. ”

Other measures associated with a decreased risk for SUID include breast-feeding and reduced smoking in the home.

The Child Fatality Report team recommends that parents and other caregivers place babies alone on their backs in a crib that does not contain toys or extra bedding. They also say that parents, caregivers and visitors should understand safe sleep practices.

The Child Fatality Report program also recommends that all Arizona health-care providers, hospitals and child-care centers model safe-sleep practices and help parents to reproduce them at home.

For more information about Mountain Park Health Center and its programs, visit <http://mountainparkhealth.org/>

