

## Baby Boxes Are All the Buzz

A Los Angeles-based business called Baby Box Co. plans to give away thousands of boxes for parents to use as baby beds. It's part of an educational model aimed at reducing sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS.

But that idea doesn't rest well with prominent doctors, researchers and organizations focused on SIDS, who characterize the boxes as untested and unregulated for infants. Unanswered questions about the boxes abound, and the product's marketing overplays its similarities to the famed Finnish program that inspired it.

About 3,500 children die each year in the U.S. in sleep-related infant deaths, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, whose Task Force on SIDS says enthusiasm about baby boxes has outpaced knowledge about them.

"I don't think we can be gung-ho, let's do baby boxes," said Dr. Rachel Moon, a University of Virginia pediatrician who chairs the Task Force. "Because the evidence just isn't there."

The Baby Box Co. "says this is just like the Finnish baby box. Well, yes, but actually no," says Dr. Moon. "The box may be the same, but they're doing it in a totally different way."

Anita Haataja, a senior researcher with Finland's Social Insurance Institution, said a 2011 poll showed that only 42% of parents used the box as a safe sleep space. It's what comes in the box that lures pregnant women to the prenatal checkups.

Dr. Moon said several factors likely played a bigger role than the box in Finland's success, including its universal health care, home visits with health professionals and generous parental leave policies – all of which have been shown to affect infant mortality. But Finland never studied their boxes, so she can't be sure.

Some 17,000 boxes have been shipped since January and surveys show 73% of parents use them in place of a crib, the Baby Box Co. said.

That's concerning to Dr. Thomas Hegyi, medical director the SIDS Center of New Jersey. No studies have verified the boxes' safety, he said. The Baby Box Co.'s website says its boxes "meet or exceed all applicable tenets" of the Consumer Product Safety Commission. But as the National Institutes of Health notes, the Commission has no mandatory safety standards for baby boxes.

"The Baby Box people say that this is the most wonderful thing because it has worked in Finland." Dr. Hegyi said, "It's nonsense."

Among the questions Drs. Hegyi and Moon are asking:

- Does the box, more confined than slatted cribs, hold a baby's exhaled CO2 differently?
- Does the box's cardboard bottom heat up when set on sun-drenched concrete, or grow weak if it touches water?

Another question: Are the boxes big enough? At just under 27 inches in length, Drs. Hegyi and Moon question if infants can outgrow the box in under 6 months, the span during which SIDS is most likely to occur. Larger babies could be left without a safe sleep space.

Dr. Hegyi said, "I hope it comes out that the boxes are effective and safe. It's easy to be supportive of this." "It's harder to say: Wait a minute, where is the evidence?"