

## 6.2 Medical History Guide – Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI)

### Medical History Guide - Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI)

The unexpected death of an infant is a tragedy for the parents/carers. Investigating infant deaths can be difficult as the situation is highly charged and emotional, and so it requires a unique and sensitive approach.

This guide includes high level of detail about the infant's health, the infant's family and events in the hours before the infant's death, including the infant's exact position and the parent/carer behaviour and use of alcohol or drugs. While these questions may feel intrusive, they relate to known risks for infant mortality, help determine why the infant died and can be asked in a sensitive way.

A detailed medical history will help the forensic pathologist determine a cause of death, including whether the infant may have suffocated, or died from an undiagnosed medical problem. The history is also important in determining the presence of risk factors for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and any potential child protection concerns.

The following points may assist you with the discussion:

- Where possible, have another clinician, such as a social worker or nurse, with you during the discussion with the family to provide support. If you choose to include the Police as observers while you take the history, agree on roles before starting.
- To build trust with the parents/carers start with less sensitive questions including contact information, general family history, the mother's pregnancy and health, psychosocial aspects and the infant's health, before moving onto the events leading up to the infant's death.
- Use the infant's name whenever possible. The Medical History Guide – Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (Section 6.1) uses [infant's name] as a prompt.
- A suggested introduction is:

*'I am so sorry about your loss. Some people describe feeling that it is not quite real, like a nightmare. I would like to help make sense of what has happened. I would like to find out why [infant's name] died and help you understand why. To do that I would like to find out as much as possible about your pregnancy, [infant's name] general health and sleeping and feeding patterns. I also need to ask some questions about you and your health as it will help us understand why some young babies die suddenly. Please let me know if you are uncomfortable with any of these questions.'*

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### 1. Identification

Infant's name  
Date of birth  
Date of death  
Sex M/F  
Ethnicity/Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander  
Address  
Postcode

### Personal information

Name of mother (and address if different from infant)  
Date of birth  
Name of father (and address if different from infant)  
Date of birth  
Consanguinity (degree of relatives)

### Healthcare providers

Name of doctor completing the medical history  
Social worker  
Hospital contact person  
Other professionals  
Interpreter present  
GP name and address

### Information retrieved from medical record

As relevant, hospital, GP, midwife, infant's personal health record ('Blue Book')  
Ambulance staff  
Include growth chart in copy of medical record

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**2. Details of transport of infant to hospital**

Place of death, home address as above/another location (specify)  
 Time found  
 Time arrived in emergency department (triage time)  
 Resuscitation carried out  
 At scene of death – police/ambulance/emergency department/hospital  
 By who? Parents/carers/GP/ambulance paramedic/hospital staff/other (specify)  
 Confirmation of death  
 By who  
 Time and date  
 Location

**3. Medical history**

Taken to emergency department/hospital by  
 History given by  
 Relationship to infant

**Family history**

Details of family and household members, including names, dates of birth, health, any previous or current illnesses including mental health, medications, occupation  
 Maternal parity and obstetric history  
 Parental relationships  
 Children, including children by previous partner  
 Household composition  
 Any previous childhood deaths in the family

**Social history**

Type and nature of housing  
 Major life events  
 Wider family support networks  
 History of family involvement with Family and Community Services  
 Domestic and family violence  
 Smoking, alcohol use

**Infant's medical history**

Pregnancy and delivery, perinatal history, feeding, growth, behaviour and development  
 Health and any previous or current illnesses, hospital admissions, medications  
 Routine checks and immunisations  
 Body systems review

**Detailed narrative account of last 24 – 48 hours**

(To include details of all activities and carers during the last 24-48 hours)

Any alcohol, medication consumed by parents/carers  
 Any medication given to infant  
 Details of infant's last sleep, including where and how placed to sleep  
 Details of feeding and care given  
 Further details of previous 2-4 weeks, including infant's health, any changes to routine, when infant last seen by a health professional

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### Events surrounding death

When infant was last seen alive and by who  
Who found the infant, where and when, appearance when the infant found  
Details of sleep environment, type of surface, mattress, bedding, objects, overwrapping or over-heating. Face or head covered. Co-sleeping. Alcohol or drugs consumed by carers.  
Who called emergency services  
Details of any resuscitation at home, by ambulance and in hospital  
For accidental/traumatic deaths, details of circumstances around the death, witnesses

### Any other relevant history

May vary according to the age of the infant, nature of the infant's death

### Genetic or metabolic disease

For concerns about genetic or metabolic disease, contact the paediatric metabolic specialist for advice about investigations required  
For concerns about a condition that may have implications for other family members, for example cardiac dysrhythmia, contact the relevant specialist for advice about investigations required

### Child protection and wellbeing

If you have any concerns about non-accidental injury or neglect, follow usual child protection procedures

## 4. Conclusion

### Cause of death

From this history do you have an impression of the possible cause of death?

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