

We Are Public Health



We work to reduce preventable infant deaths.

From 1999 to 2011, there were 10 infant deaths associated with co-sleeping in Fremont County, Wyoming. Many of these involved parents who were impaired by drugs and alcohol. In 2012, Fremont County Public Health and Northern Arapaho Tribal Health started a program that teaches how to provide a safe sleep environment for infants and distributes cribs to families that need them.

Northwest Center for Public Health Practice

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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In 2012, [data](#) collected through the Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) process showed what many in Fremont County, Wyoming, had suspected: their community had a problem with infant deaths caused by co-sleeping. In fact, in the years 1999 to 2011, 10 infant deaths were associated with co-sleeping, making it the leading cause of infant death in Fremont County. (Co-sleeping occurs when parents or caregivers share a sleeping surface with infants.)

Once the MAPP process confirmed that co-sleeping deaths were a major health problem, Jamie Cardine, a Maternal and Child Health Nurse with [Fremont County Public Health](#), looked for funding opportunities that could expand efforts to prevent co-sleeping deaths. In particular, she sought funding to purchase “Pack ‘n Play” cribs to give to parents who could not provide safe sleep surfaces for their infants.

Cardine saw an opportunity from a private foundation, but the guidelines said that applicants needed to find \$2,500 in matching funds to apply. Cardine says, “My health department didn’t have \$2,500, so I worked with Northern Arapaho Tribal Health and Wyoming’s Office of Multicultural Health.” This collaboration ultimately led to a successful grant application.

The risk of infant death due to co-sleeping increases when caregivers use drugs or alcohol, and Fremont County has a relatively high rate of drug and alcohol abuse. Cardine explains, “Drug or alcohol use prior to co-sleeping is a factor we can’t control but we can teach parents to put their infants on safe surfaces to sleep.”

When families receive the cribs, staff from Fremont County Public Health or Northern Arapaho Home Visiting Program meet with each family individually to go over safe sleep practices and how to use the Pack n’ Play. Parents also sign an agreement that they are not going to co-sleep.

Mandy Running Crane, Program Coordinator for the Northern Arapaho Home Visiting Program says: “Being able to give out Pack ‘n Play cribs encourages people not to co-sleep. There are a lot of families that can’t afford separate sleeping areas for their infants, so people are appreciative.”

Cardine says that the effort to promote safe sleep is also helped by the involvement of the local media. The county attorney has prosecuted several cases of co-sleeping deaths as homicides because these cases were also linked to drug and alcohol use. Media coverage of the cases has included information about the prevention efforts of Fremont County Public Health and Northern Arapaho Tribal Health. As one indicator of community awareness, several people have contacted Cardine to see if they could donate Pack ‘n Play cribs to the program.

About half of the cribs purchased by the grant funds have been given away. Both Cardine and Running Crane are committed to continuing the program and will look for new funds to do so when the current supply of cribs has been distributed. Cardine is hopeful that their efforts will make a difference—seven months have passed since there was a co-sleeping infant death in Fremont County.