

New federal rules target crib safety, durability



John Lee, AP

Drop-side cribs have been associated with at least 32 infant suffocations.

By Darla Carter, The (Louisville, Ky.) Courier-Journal

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A night in a crib shouldn't be a dangerous thing for a baby, but thousands of injuries occur each year.

With that in mind, new federal standards have been put in place to make cribs safer for little ones.

The new standards "usher in a safer generation of cribs" for babies, "who aren't able to protect themselves," said Kim Dulic, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

The standards ban the production of drop-side cribs -- which carried a risk of entrapment and falls -- and improve other cribs. Changes to be enforced by the commission include strengthening mattress supports and crib slats; increasing durability of crib hardware; and implementing tougher safety testing.

The standards went into effect June 28, so new cribs are already in stores, Dulic said. But some entities, such as child-care centers and hotels, have until Dec. 28, 2012, to comply.

"This is the first time that crib standards have had any substantial revisions in more than 30 years," Dulic said.

The move was prompted by the passage of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008, which child safety advocates pushed for to help protect kids. The new standards also follow a rash of problems, including hardware failures, with drop-side cribs.

Drop-side cribs have been associated with at least 32 infant suffocations, according to the commission. In recent years, more than 11 million cribs, including many of the drop-side variety, have been recalled, and so have many bassinets and play yards.

From 1990 to 2008, cribs, playpens and bassinets were associated with an average of 9,561 injuries and more than 100 deaths per year that were treated in U.S. emergency rooms. That's according to a study by researchers at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. More than 80 percent of the injuries involved cribs, and falls were common.

Despite the new federal standards, Joyce Davis, president of the advocacy group Keeping Babies Safe, worries some parents will hold onto potentially unsafe cribs for sentimental reasons.

"I think there's a lot of emotional attachment to cribs," Davis said.

Even if another child used the crib without incident, "parents should not use those drop-side cribs at all," she said.

Also, parents need "to be vigilant to make sure that the crib that they are using -- even if it's not a drop-side -- has not been recalled," Davis said.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission and Recalls.gov provide online notices of many recalled products, including cribs. Keeping Babies Safe also posts recall notices.

Davis said there was a dearth of information available on crib safety when her 4-month-old son, Garret, died in a crib-related accident in December 2000.

In founding Keeping Babies Safe in 2006, "our primary mission was really to ensure that all babies had a safe sleep environment and to provide a free information resource for parents" that was accurate and reliable, Davis said. When "my son had passed away, that information was not available and it was very, very upsetting."

The group also was among those that worked with Congress and others to "represent the consumers' perspective" in the new crib standards, she said.

The commission has held workshops and conference calls to get manufacturers and retailers prepared. "All cribs sold in stores or (for) resale must meet these new requirements," Dulic said.

The commission recommends that parents buy a brand-new crib instead of using a used or hand-me-down crib that may be unsafe.

If you own a drop-side crib -- and perhaps can't afford to replace it -- Dulic recommends contacting the manufacturer to try to obtain an immobilizer, a protective device to make those cribs more secure. Also, if you keep a drop-side crib -- or any older crib -- you should be sure to check it often to make sure it's not developing problems, such as loose or missing parts, Dulic said.

Parents not only need to buy a safe crib but also to position their baby on his or her back -- with no extra bedding around -- to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Staying safe

Parents who want to know whether their child's crib meets new standards can try contacting the manufacturer or asking for the certificate of conformity at the store. Cribs in stores now meet the new federal standards that went into effect June 28.

- Beware of drop-side cribs,(AT) which have been associated with infant suffocations and numerous recalls.
- Make sure the crib hasn't been recalled,(AT) whether it's a drop-side or not. That great find at a yard sale or hand-me-down from a relative or friend might be on the list. Consumers can get recall information from www.cpsc.gov, www.recalls.gov and www.keepingbabiesafe.org.
- Watch a Safe Sleep for Babies video(AT) at <http://tinyurl.com/42d46uo>. It's also available on the Newborn Channel at some hospitals.

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