



North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

Spotlight on Infant Death Report

2022

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Introduction

Infants, defined as children under one year of age, accounted for a total of 226 deaths in North Carolina in 2022. The details below provide a data spotlight on the 210 finalized infant fatality cases as of July 2024. Numbers are subject to change. It is important to note that this report focuses exclusively on North Carolina residents and infant fatalities within the North Carolina Medical Examiner (ME) System.

Among the finalized infant fatality cases within the Medical Examiner (ME) System Jurisdiction, instances where the certifying pathologist was concerned with the infant’s sleep environment or position or both as potential contributing risk factors to the fatality are detailed below. Infants in potentially compromising sleep spaces accounted for 64% of the 210 finalized infant fatalities during the year, totaling 135 deaths. Of those 135 sleep-related deaths, 29 were classified as accidental manner of death, while 106 were classified as undetermined manner of death. Please note the total number (9) of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) cases are excluded from the final counts as they are not considered sleep-related deaths.

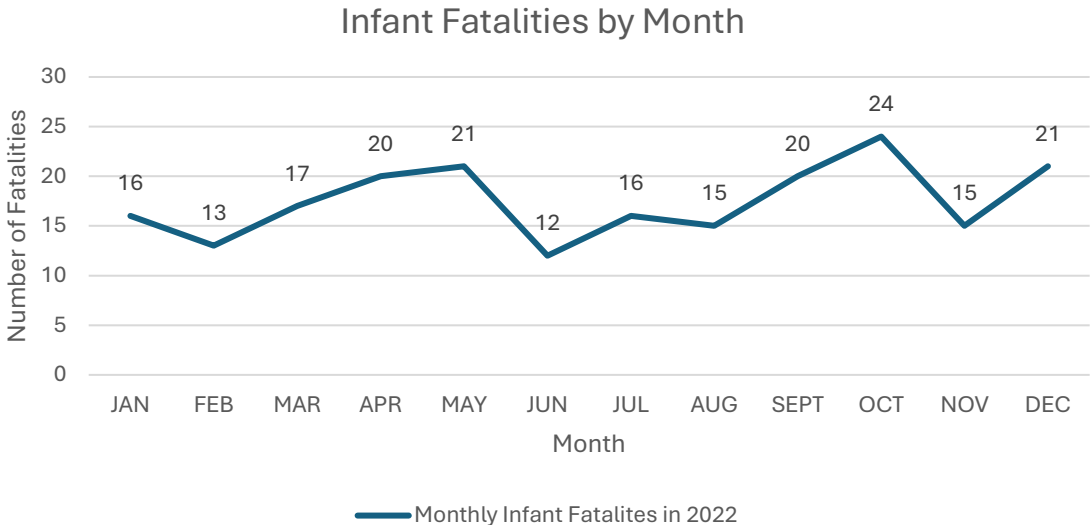
2022 Infant Fatality Spotlight – North Carolina Medical Examiner System

Trends and Patterns in Infant Fatalities for 2022

Monthly Trends

In 2022, the highest number of infant fatalities occurred in October. In contrast, June experienced the lowest number of infant fatalities. This analysis highlights the significant monthly variations in infant mortality rates throughout the year.

Figure 1. Monthly Infant Fatalities in 2022



Manner of Death

The figure below depicts infant fatalities across varying age milestones, highlighting the vulnerability of North Carolina’s newborns. The curve of infant mortality illustrates the importance of prioritizing familial assistance and resources to parents and caregivers navigating the challenges of infant care. From providing continued education on safe sleep practices to accessible healthcare resources, bolstering support around families is a cornerstone in safeguarding the well-being of the most vulnerable.

Figure 2. Manner of Death of Infant Fatalities in 2022

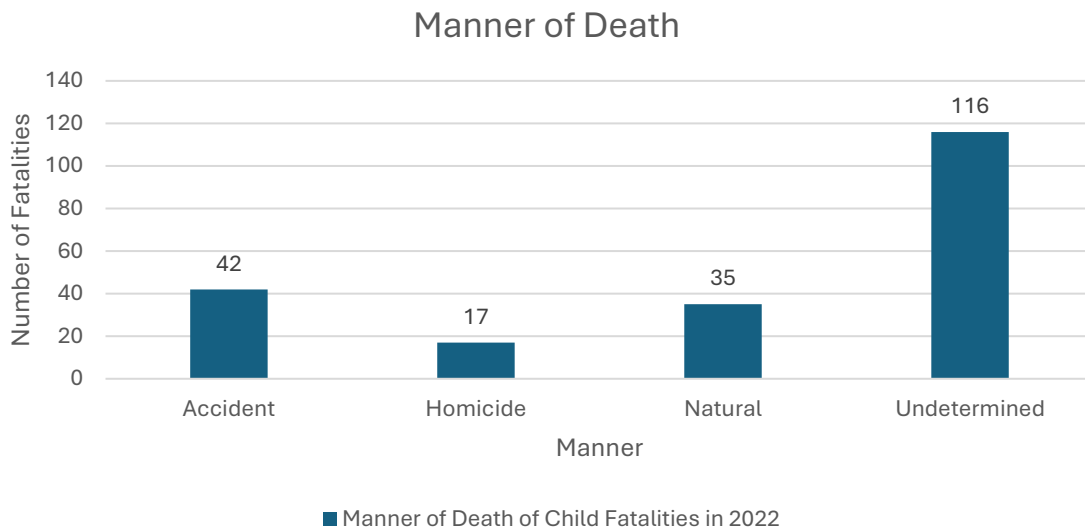
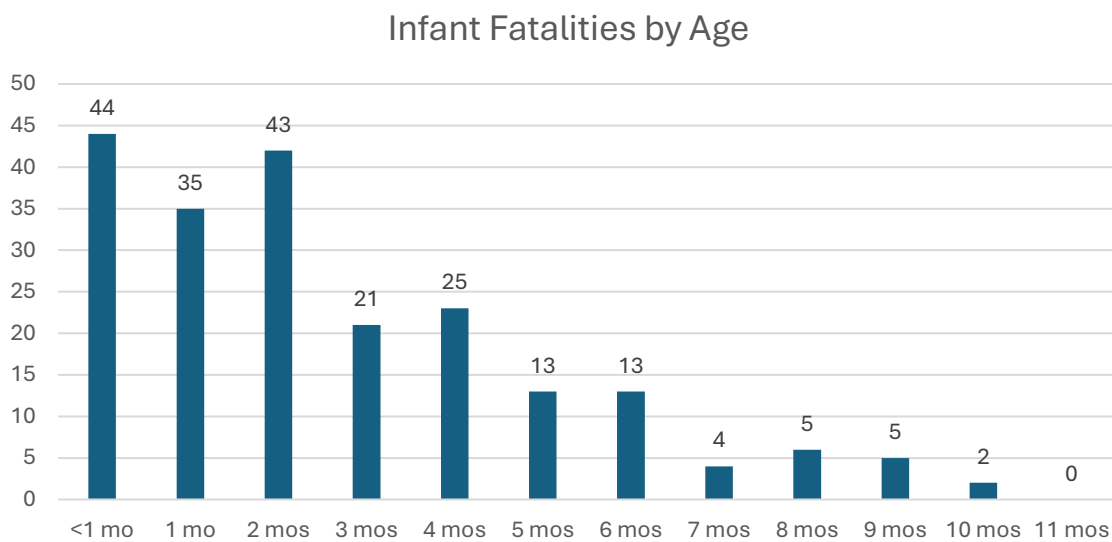
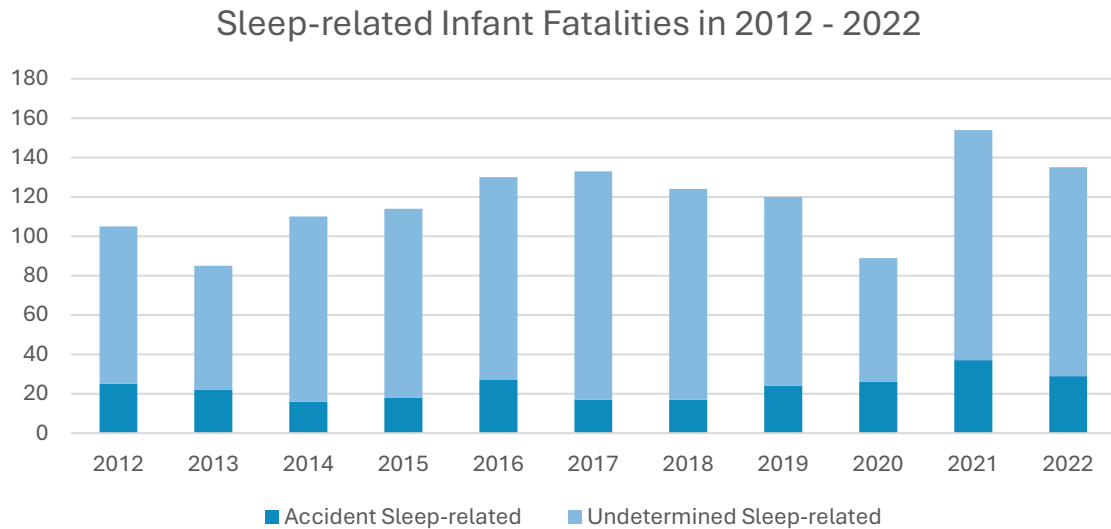


Figure 3. Infant Fatalities by Age in 2022



Sleep-related

Figure 4. Total Sleep-related Infant Fatalities from 2012 to 2022



Sleep Environment

To provide a more detailed analysis of the potential sleep-related infant fatalities:

- Among the infant *accident/sleep-related* deaths, 21 of the 29 deaths were in a co-sleeping environment.
- Among the infant *accident/sleep-related* deaths, 8 of the 29 deaths were in other unsafe sleep environments such as extra items in the crib or an unsafe sleep location (in a car seat, on an adult sleep surface, etc.).
- Among the *undetermined/sleep-related* deaths, 70 of the 106 deaths were in a co-sleeping environment.
- Among the *undetermined/sleep-related* deaths, 36 of the 106 deaths were in other unsafe sleep environments such as extra items in the crib or an unsafe sleep location (in a car seat, on an adult sleep surface, etc.).

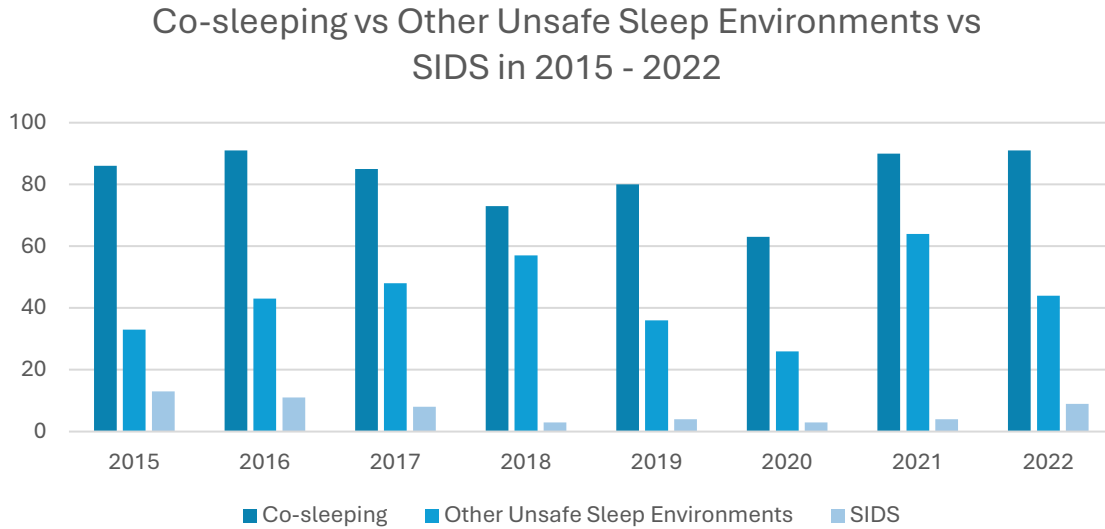
Table 1. Classification of Sleep Environments for Infant Fatalities in 2022

Classification	Accident	Undetermined	Total
Co-sleeping	21	70	= 91 Co-sleeping deaths
Unsafe Physical Sleep Environment	8	36	= 44 Unsafe Physical Sleep Environment deaths
Total	29	106	135

SIDS

SIDS deaths are not included in the metrics for unsafe sleep environments. However, the bar graph below compares co-sleeping, other unsafe physical sleep environments, and SIDS from 2015 to 2022.

Figure 5. Co-sleeping vs Other Unsafe Sleep Environments vs SIDS from 2015 to 2022

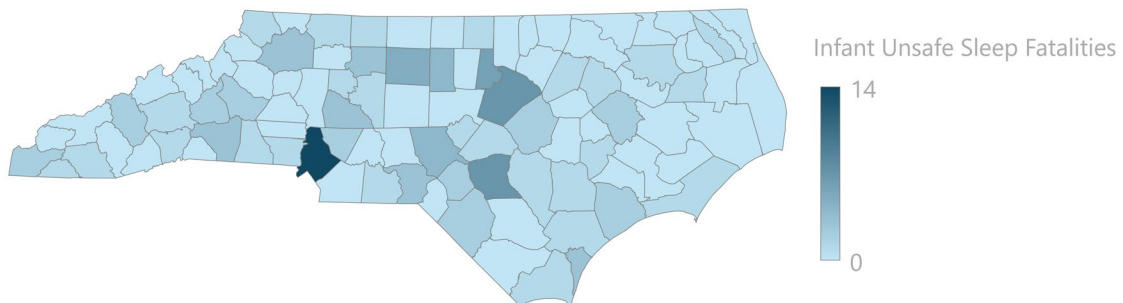


Geographic Distribution

The geographic map below illustrates the number of infant fatalities due to unsafe sleep environments per county of residence for 2022. Please note, that the map excludes counties with no recorded infant deaths related to unsafe sleep and deaths of out-of-state residents.

Figure 6. Sleep-related Infant Fatalities by Residence County in 2022

Sleep-related Infant Fatalities by Residence County in 2022



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Summary Table

The following summary table provides an overview of the 210 finalized infant fatalities within the ME System of the State of North Carolina categorized by manner, means, and the number of deaths for 2022. Due to pending cases, numbers are subject to change.

Table 2. Finalized Infant Fatalities within ME System for Death Year 2022 – Ages 0 – 11 months

Manner	Means	Number of Fatalities
Accident (42)	Asphyxia	25
	Blunt	3
	Environmental	3
	Fire/Burns	2
	Hanging	1
	Medical Treatment	1
	Motor Vehicle	4
	Other	2
	Poisoning/Toxin	1
Homicide (17)	Abuse or Neglect	1
	Asphyxia	1
	Blunt	9
	Gun	2
	Other	2
	Poisoning/Toxin	1
	Sharp	1
Natural (35)	Natural	26
	SIDS	9
Undetermined (116)	Abuse or Neglect	1
	Medical Treatment	1
	Natural	1
	Unknown	109
	Other	4
Pending		16