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Spike in B.C. sudden infant deaths concerns coroner

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B.C.'s chief coroner is urging parents to use safe sleep practices in light of a spike in the number of sudden infant deaths across the province this year.

There have been 21 sudden infant deaths in B.C. so far this year, while there were 16 sudden infant deaths for all of 2010, Lisa Lapointe said Tuesday.

Lapointe said that in most of this year's deaths, risk factors included babies sleeping with an adult, on a couch or a soft bed.

Babies should be placed on their back in a crib with a fitted sheet, without a lot of puffy blankets or toys that could obscure their face, Lapointe said.

"We know there's been a spike in the first six months and we know it's related to unsafe sleep practices. Why so many of those [deaths] have come up this year, we don't know," Lapointe said.

She said the reason for the increased number of deaths is all the more mysterious because health authorities, family doctors and public health nurses have kept up efforts to educate parents.

The B.C. Coroner's Service is continuing to investigate the 21 deaths.