



Information Note to Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) and Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) Sites

Subject: Baby Boxes

Issue: Baby boxes have recently begun to be distributed in Canada. CAPC and CPNP funded projects and community-based public health partners have asked the Public Health Agency of Canada for their position on these boxes. This note provides information on the boxes and answers key questions to help organizations assess the boxes and their contents.

The information provided herein is for informational purposes only and should not be read as an endorsement of the boxes by PHAC.

Q1. What are baby boxes?

Baby boxes began in Finland in 1938. Expectant parents receive a box filled with clothes and baby care items for their baby's first months of life. In addition, the box itself is designed to be a sleep space for the baby's first months.

Q2. Are all of the boxes the same?

No. There are currently at least two organizations that have begun promoting the distribution of their boxes in Canada:

- **The Baby Box Co.** is distributing baby boxes designed for infant sleeping, which include a mattress, other baby care items and information. According to a Baby Box Co. spokesperson, the contents will be regional-specific. In Canada, the boxes are currently distributed free of charge in collaboration with province-specific sponsors/partners in Alberta, Ontario and Nunavut. The Baby Box Co. also sells the boxes to the general public through their online retail site.
- **Baby Box Canada** is distributing a box of free product samples to new and expectant parents that sign up online. The box itself is NOT designed for infant sleeping. The company is beginning distribution in Ontario, with plans to expand to other provinces.



Q3. Are the boxes that are intended for infant sleep “approved” by Health Canada?

No. Consumer products, including baby boxes, are not subject to pre-market approval, and Health Canada does not provide "accreditation" to specific consumer products.

There are no federal restrictions regarding the provision of free baby boxes in Canada, providing that companies comply with all applicable regulations with respect to the box, if it is used as a bassinet, as well as all of the items included in the box.

If a baby box is intended to be used as a bassinet, it is subject to the stringent requirements of the *Cribs, Cradles and Bassinets Regulations (CCBR)*. In addition, the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act prohibits the manufacture, import, advertisement or sale in Canada of any consumer products that pose a danger to human health or safety.

Q4. Are the boxes that are intended for infant sleep really safe?

The safest place for your baby to sleep is on his or her back, in a crib, cradle or bassinet. However, when those are not available, baby boxes which comply with the *CCBR* and are designed for infant sleep can provide a low cost, accessible and portable alternative. The experience of over 70 years of use in Finland suggests the boxes are safe when used as directed. And the boxes are a much safer alternative to placing a baby on an unsafe sleep surface, such as a couch, adult bed with loose bedding, etc..

Caution should be taken to ensure the box is placed on a stable surface and the instructions are followed. The condition of the box should be checked regularly, including ensuring that leaks or spills have not deteriorated the sides or bottom. Other key principles of safe sleep should be followed, such as placing the box close to the parent/caregiver’s bed, with no additional bedding or stuffed toys added to the box, with the baby placed in the box alone and on their back.

Q5. Is there guidance to help CAPC and CPNP sites to assess the contents of the box?

While free products are helpful to parents, CAPC/CPNP sites that promote or distribute the boxes are encouraged to assess the content of the boxes to ensure they align with their health promotion objectives. Issues to consider when assessing the items in the boxes (whether intended for sleep or not) include:

- Cultural appropriateness
- Health (e.g., watch for processed food products (or coupons) aimed at infants and young children that contain added sugar, salt)
- General safety (e.g., are items age-appropriate and is their intended use easy to understand?)



Q6. Do the products and information promote and protect breastfeeding?

- Sites that distribute or promote baby boxes and who are implementing the Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) and/or want to comply with the World Health Organization's Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes (the Code) should make sure the boxes do not contain products or coupons for products that may undermine breastfeeding.
- PHAC and Health Canada recommend exclusive breastfeeding to six months of age and continued to two years and beyond. PHAC and Health Canada also encourage the implementation of the BFI and the Code. These initiatives aim to protect and promote the best infant feeding practices. The Code is about ensuring appropriate marketing of products that could interfere with breastfeeding. These include:
 - Infant formula and follow-up formula
 - Baby bottles
 - Artificial nipples and pacifiers/soothers
 - Baby foods directed at infants less than 6 months of age
- Under the Code, there should be:
 - No advertising of these products to the public.
 - No gifts or free samples of these products to mothers

More information on the Code and how to put it into practice can be found in Chapter 5 of [*Protecting, Promoting and Supporting Breastfeeding: A Practical Workbook for Community-based Programs*](#).

Summary:

The safest place for a baby to sleep is alone in a crib, cradle or bassinet. Baby boxes which comply with the *CCBR* and that are designed for infant sleeping provide a low cost and practical alternative for young infants, providing the instructions are followed and other key principles of safe sleep are put in place. More information on safe sleep can be found at:

www.canada.ca (search for safe sleep)

www.publichealth.gc.ca/safesleep

CAPC/CPNP sites and other organizations involved in the distribution or promotion of baby boxes are encouraged to assess the product contents carefully to ensure they align with key health promotion objectives, including breastfeeding promotion.

Inquiries and comments may be addressed to: DCA.public.inquiries@phac-aspc.gc.ca

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