The most heartbreaking occurrence for any parent is the sudden, inexplicable loss of a child. With over 2,000 deaths each year of apparently healthy babies in the U.S. due to sudden infant death syndrome, SIDS ranks as the one of the major causes of death of children under 1. A recent medical journal article in The Lancet discovered E. coli and Staphylococcus aureus in almost half of the infants that had a sudden, unexpected death.

The study examined autopsy samples from 470 infants who had a sudden, unexpected death between 1996 and 2005 in a London hospital. They found dangerous bacteria in 181 of the 365 babies who died. The study noted that "the high rate of detection of group 2 pathogens, particularly *S aureus* and *E coli*, ... suggests that these bacteria could be associated with this condition."

The researchers also made a point of cautioning that the bacteria identified may not be the specific cause of SIDS.

"We don't know whether it's a cause or if it's identifying another potential risk factor," said Dr. Nigel Klein, a professor at the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, where the study was conducted, and one of the paper's authors.

Dr. Klein stated that the higher level of bacteria might be evidence of another condition that killed the baby, such as a room that was too hot or had poor ventilation. Or it may have been coincidental.

Receiving a SIDS diagnosis means that no other cause of death can be found in an otherwise

healthy baby who dies suddenly, usually in their sleep.

Bacteria found in vital organs

Most of the E. coli and Staph were detected in the lungs and spleens of the babies that were diagnosed with SIDS.

At birth, mothers give some of their antibodies against infection to their babies. But when babies are from 8 to 10 weeks old, the maternal antibodies are depleted and the babies typically have not started producing enough of their own.

That could make them particularly vulnerable to bacterial infections, said James Morris, a pathologist at the Royal Infirmary in Lancaster, who co-authored an accompanying commentary in the journal.

SIDS usually strikes when babies are between 8 and 10 weeks old.

For more information on SIDS and vital prevention methods, please consider visiting the American SIDS institute website.

Remain GermAware

The death of a child under any circumstances is unbelievably tragic. Studies and research that help identify potential risk factors and ultimately find the cause of SIDS are to be applauded. Take the time to remain educated, prepared and GermAware. It may make a difference for you, your family and friends.