

# Cardboard baby box to tackle infant mortality

Chris Smyth Health Editor

New mothers at an NHS hospital will be given Finnish-style “baby boxes” in an attempt to save lives.

Doctors hope that getting more babies to sleep in cardboard boxes might cut infant mortality rates in Britain, which has one of the highest levels in Europe.

Since the 1930s Finnish mothers have been given a cardboard box containing essentials for babies, such as sleepsuits and nappies, as well as advice leaflets for parents.

Some people believe that the box itself is a key element because the card-

board confines mean that it is less likely for newborns to roll on to their stomachs, one of the main risks of cot death.

The baby box is now being tried by the NHS for the first time, with parents at Queen Charlotte’s and Chelsea hospital in west London being given a box in a pilot study. The hospital will monitor the progress of the children until they are eight months old.

“I’m hopeful that ultimately it will be something that can be picked up nationwide,” Karen Joash, a consultant obstetrician at the hospital, said.

“For too many years the UK has fallen behind its European counterparts when it comes to reducing infant

mortality. These boxes have been proven to help reduce the infant mortality rate in Finland.”

Before this year’s Holyrood elections in Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon promised to offer all parents a baby box. They cost about £100 but Dr Joash hopes that companies can provide sponsorship.

Infant mortality rates in Finland are almost half those in Britain and have fallen by 97 per cent since the boxes were introduced 80 years ago. A study published last year found that Britain had the fourth highest level in the western world, with 1,630 deaths per one million children.

Russell Viner, of the Royal College of



The NHS will begin a trial of the boxes. Finland has used them since the 1930s

Paediatrics and Child Health, said that there was little hard evidence that the boxes were responsible for the fall in mortality rates in Finland but added: “There is a logic why it might make a difference. It may stop the baby moving to sleep on its front, which is a risk for sudden infant death syndrome.”

“I suspect it’s more likely to be something about standardisation of care. All mothers are given the same health education and so it’s not ‘the poor get nothing and the rich get a Moses basket.’”

He added: “Good on the NHS for trying something that’s relatively inexpensive and is welcomed by mothers [but] it’s important that it’s evaluated.”



Shining glory Excessive Sensual Indulgence, by Tim Noble and Sue Webster, is showing at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in central London until September

## Middle-class children ‘lose IQ points at nursery’

Oliver Moody Science Correspondent

Middle-class parents risk knocking several points off their infants’ IQ scores by putting them in daycare, a study suggests.

The effect appears to be particularly bad for young girls from wealthy families, who may lose as many as two IQ points for each month they spend in daycare.

Scientists warned that when children from richer backgrounds were sent into daycare they might miss out on the huge cognitive benefits of one-to-one interactions with their parents, which are linked to improvements in vocabulary, memory and general intelligence.

In the first experiment of its kind, economists and psychologists at the University of Bologna tracked down 444 children who had been through the city’s daycare system before their third birthday. By the time they were aged between eight and 14 they scored 0.5 per cent lower than their peers in IQ tests for every month they had been away from their parents. Girls suffered a worse deficit of 0.7 per cent per month.

Among children from families with incomes of £100,000 a year or more the impact was much more severe: 1.1 per cent for all and 1.6 per cent for girls.

It is not clear how well the findings translate to the UK. In Bologna there is on average one carer for every six infants, compared with one for every four in England. Independent experts said the relatively small sample size also made it hard to draw broad conclusions.

The results contradict earlier studies on the link between daycare and intelligence in later childhood, most of which have found that it brings a small benefit.

Andrea Ichino, an economist who worked on the study, said: “I cannot say that I’m sure that if we carried out this study for kids with the same [family] income in the UK we would get the same effect, but I expect that you would get similar effects.”

The scientists argue that the first three years of a child’s life are a critical window when talking and playing with their parents can substantially boost cognitive development. These interactions are especially important for girls.

Nina Drange, an economist at Statistics Norway who has found the opposite effect in her work, said that it was hard to tell whether the results were unique to Bologna. “It is normal to find positive effects from disadvantaged children and smaller or no effects for children from more advantaged families,” she said.

## Riotous revival is the perfect pick-me-up

Film Kate Muir

### Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie (15)

★★★★☆

While the apocalypse continues in the real world, *Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie* remains gloriously Botoxed in a time that austerity forgot, still drenched in Bollinger and bad behaviour. Although Patsy and Edina are living in the modern world of Twitter, Instagram and kale purges, their behaviour is no better — and often a great deal worse — than before.

Welcome back Joanna Lumley and Jennifer Saunders. The film is faithful to the television series conceived 25 years ago but also ups the ante by stubbing out a cigarette in its oyster, ie killing Kate Moss! No, this is not a spoiler because it occurs a) in the trailer and b) early in the movie,

allowing the plot to motor off to the French Riviera via a series of catastrophic coke-fuelled decisions made by these icons of female friendship. Moss remains deadpan, in both senses.

Lumley is pure goddess, curling her rouge-noir lips and rasping vile remarks. But, as always, Patsy’s *joie de vivre* makes her appallingly entertaining and attractive. Whisper it but Lumley is 70 and at a point in the comedy, where she dresses as a man, looks a handsome 30. And she’s on Tinder.

Saunders models more absolutely hellish fashion as Edina, whose PR business has fallen on lean times. She has only Lulu and a cheap vodka on her books so is desperate to win a contract with Moss.

Moss is one of roughly 60 celebrity cameos in this film, a sign of the deep affection for the television series and the ability of Saunders as a writer to take the mickey out of the fashion



Sweetie, darling: Edina and Patsy unite

world without being Hermès-handbagged to death. Some of the best appearances include Joan Collins, Dame Edna Everage, Lily Cole, Emma Bunton and Jean Paul Gaultier.

Saunders’s sharp details deflate the fashionista pomp deliciously: mourners place bottles of sauvignon blanc and Hunter wellies at a shrine

to Moss. Stella McCartney has a major role and, in a super-erotic moment, Patsy asks after Stella’s dad, Paul, whom she last saw in 1969, and then does a snaky thing with her tongue.

Bubbles (Jane Horrocks) remains an irritating presence in costumes covered in plastic blow-up hashtags, while June Whitfield returns as Edina’s mum, whose regal entrance on a Stannah stairlift was met with cheers during the premiere.

The plot staggers around and falls over just like the drunk protagonists but who cares, frankly, sweetie, darling, when we’re laughing like this? Celia Imrie turns up as Edina’s PR rival Claudia Bing, and Julia Sawalha is back as Saffy, the long-suffering sensible daughter who now has a 13-year-old child of her own.

So this is not merely girls behaving badly but grandmothers behaving badly and it’s a hilarious antidote to reality right now.