

## Baby furniture - safety tips

Every year approximately 400 Victorian children require hospital treatment for injuries related to infant and nursery products. Around one in five injuries to children less than 12 months of age involves baby furniture.

First-time parents need to have an eye for detail when buying baby furniture. Instead of colour, style and comfort, make safety the vital requirement. Remember, even if your baby furniture meets every safety standard and suggestion, your child still needs supervision.

### Cots

An average of 69 Victorian children need hospital treatment every year for serious injuries related to a cot. Injuries include falls and getting parts of the body stuck between bars. Fittings such as bolts, knobs and corner posts can catch on clothing and cause strangulation. All cots sold in Australia need to comply with the Australian Standard AS/NZS 2172-2003.

If your cot is a hand-me-down, make sure it meets the following requirements:

- The bars or panels should be spaced between 50mm and 95mm apart – bigger gaps can trap a baby's head, arms or legs. If the bars or panels are made from flexible material, the maximum spacing between the bars or panels should be less than 95mm.
- The cot should have a minimum depth of 600mm from the base of the mattress to the top of the cot.
- The gap between the mattress and the cot sides should be less than 25mm.
- Check that there are no spaces between 30mm and 50mm that could trap your child's arms or legs.
- Check there are no small holes or openings between 5mm and 12mm that may trap small fingers.
- Place the cot in a safe spot and use locking brakes.

### Safety considerations for cots

When setting up the cot:

- Position the cot away from heaters, power points, windows or curtain and blind cords. Cords are a strangulation hazard.
- Never use electric blankets or hot water bottles for babies or young children.
- Don't hang anything like pictures or mirrors nearby, where there is a danger of the item falling into the cot. Do not leave mobiles or toys with stretch or elastic cords within reach of your child.
- Do not use U or V shaped pillows for children under two years old. It is safer not to use a pillow at all for children under two.
- Do not allow small objects that could cause your child to choke to be placed in the cot or within reach. Keep the cot uncluttered, as a child may climb on a pile of soft toys and fall over the cot rail or side.

### Before your baby can sit up

Adjust the cot for **baby** to the highest position to reduce adult back pain, and then lower the cot down to the lowest position before the child can sit up.

### Prams and strollers

An average of 42 Victorian children need hospital treatment every year for an injury related to a pram or stroller. Most injuries are caused by the pram or stroller tipping backwards. Choose a pram or stroller that complies with the Australian Standard AS2088.

Other considerations include:

- Prams for babies under six months should have a backrest that reclines at an angle of more than 135 degrees to the bottom of the seat.
- Use a full, five-point body harness to reduce the risk of falls.
- Brakes should be fitted to at least two wheels.
- Sensible storage space is important, such as a basket slung underneath. Take care not to overload the pram. Avoid hanging shopping from the handles; this may cause the pram to tip over.
- A gap-free interior will reduce the risk of your child's fingers and toes getting caught.
- Look for a pram that has a strong frame, easy steering, solid and durable wheels, and locks that work.

### **Safety considerations for strollers**

To reduce the risk of injury:

- Use a safety harness – even for short trips.
- Don't allow a child to be left alone sleeping in a pram or stroller. Never use a pram or stroller as a substitute for a cot, as unsupervised sleep in a pram is not safe.

### **High chairs**

An average of 75 Victorian children need hospital treatment each year for injuries related to high chairs. Falling is a common cause of injury. A high chair is suitable for a baby who can sit upright alone, usually about 6–8 months of age. The chair may be useful until the child is two or three years old.

Considerations when buying a high chair include:

- A sturdy design that doesn't rock easily
- A simple design that is easy to clean
- A tray that can't be moved by the child.

### **Safety considerations for high chairs**

To reduce the risk of injury from high chairs:

- Always remember to place the baby in the five-point body harness to prevent falls when using a high chair.
- Always supervise the child.
- Keep the chair away from appliance cords, curtain cords and anything else the child could grab.
- Keep the high chair at least one metre away from kitchen benches and stovetops to avoid the risk of scalds.

### **Change tables**

Babies frequently fall from change tables. An average of 65 Victorian babies and infants need hospital treatment every year for injuries related to a change table. These injuries are often caused when a baby falls from a height of up to 1.5 metres to the floor.

Consider whether you really want to use a change table or if you wish to change your baby on a large towel on the floor. Around one in four baby furniture related injuries that require hospital treatment involve change tables. A change table should have:

- Roll-off protection, such as a child safety harness and raised edges. Change tables should have ends and sides that are raised at least 100mm to prevent your baby from falling. All edges should be smooth and the change table must be sturdy.
- No gaps that could injure fingers or toes.

When using a change table:

- Have everything you need to change the baby close at hand.
- Never leave the baby alone – keep one hand on the child at all times. Ignore interruptions or take the baby with you if you have to leave the room.
- Use a safety harness at all times.

## Playpens

Playpens are used for short periods to put young children in when you are cooking or on the telephone. Some parents give the baby the freedom to move around the room while the parent sits inside the playpen to iron or sew! When buying a playpen, remember that children as young as nine months of age can pull themselves up into a standing position so make sure the playpen is sturdy.

Other considerations include:

- Ensure that all folding parts have latches that lock securely and cannot be undone by your baby.
- The playpen should be at least half a metre high. Check that the playpen is strong and not easily tipped over.
- The bars should be spaced between 50 and 95mm apart (similar to a cot). Larger gaps can trap a child's head.
- Keep the playpen clear of heaters, stoves and power points.
- Keep the playpen away from dangling blind and curtain cords as these may become caught around the baby's neck.

## Dangerous furniture

Avoid the following items of baby furniture:

- **Baby walkers** – an average of 13 Victorian children need hospital treatment every year for injuries related to baby walkers. The use of baby walkers for normal healthy babies is not recommended. Walkers do not help babies learn to walk and can actually interfere with normal development. They are banned in some countries. Babies have little control over the direction and speed of a baby walker and can easily overbalance. They cannot see where they are going or what they are running over. Babies in walkers can move faster and reach higher than usual, putting them at risk of scalds and poisoning.
- **Toy boxes with heavy lids** – a child might have the strength to open the lid, but not to hold it. Children can be injured if a heavy lid closes suddenly. Children like to hide in items such as toy boxes. There have also been cases where children have been trapped inside. Children up to the age of two are most at risk. Provide ventilation holes in toy boxes to prevent suffocation. A special closing hinge on the toy box can prevent finger jams, or you could buy a toy box without a lid. If you buy a toy box with a lid, the lid should be lightweight and removable. If a toy box has a lock, it must be a simple one that a trapped child can open from the inside.

## Where to get help

- Baby furniture manufacturers and retailers
- The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre Tel. (03) 9345 5085
- Consumer Affairs Victoria
- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
- In any emergency, call an ambulance Tel. 000

## Things to remember

- Baby furniture accounts for around 20 per cent of injuries to children aged 12 months or less.
- Cots must comply with Australian Safety Standard AS/NZS 2172-2003.
- Even if your baby furniture meets every safety standard and suggestion, your child still needs close supervision.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Royal Childrens Hospital - Safety Centre

**Copyright** © 1999/2009 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.

- This Better Health Channel fact sheet has passed through a rigorous approval process. For the latest updates and more information visit [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au).

