

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 one year old 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 priority. Remember, even if your baby furniture meets every safety standard and recommendation, your child still needs supervision.

Cots

Be wary of second-hand and heirloom cots, as they can pose a hazard to children. An average of 69 Victorian children need hospital treatment every year for serious injuries related to cots. Injuries include falls and getting parts of their 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 and ends should be less than 20mm.
- Check that there are no spaces between 30mm and 50mm that could trap your child's arms or legs.
- Check that there are no small holes or openings between 5mm and 12mm that could trap your child's 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, as 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 younger than two.
- Do not place small objects that could cause your child to choke in the cot or within reach.
- Keep the cot uncluttered. Remove climbing aids (such as large toys) from the cot once your child can stand, as they may climb on to them and fall over the cot rail or side.
- Make sure the cot has four castors; one pair must have brakes.
- Regularly check that nuts and bolts are tight, as per the maintenance instructions supplied with the cot.
- **Before your baby can sit up** you can adjust the cot to 'baby' (to the highest position) to avoid adult back pain, but lower the cot to the lowest position just before your baby starts sitting up.

Prams and strollers

On average, 42 Victorian children per year need hospital treatment for an injury related to use of 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 NZS/AS2088. The standard requires:

- A tether strap to help carers retain control of prams and strollers. Wear the tether strap when walking and employ parking brake and tether strap when the pram or stroller is stationary (using the tether straps even when parking brakes are in use – to help stop roll-away incidents)
- A restraint harness to prevent falls
- A red parking brake
- Safe-use warning labels and safety requirements to prevent entrapment

Safety considerations for prams and strollers

When using a pram or stroller, remember:

- Prams and strollers are designed to move freely. Wear the tether strap when moving and use the parking brake when the pram or stroller is stationary.
- Use the full five-point restraint harness at all times – even for short trips.
- Unsupervised sleep in a pram or stroller is not safe. Never leave a sleeping child alone in a pram or stroller, and avoid using a pram or stroller as a substitute for a cot.

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. Do not overload the pram. Avoid hanging shopping from the handles as 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 brake locks that work.

High chairs

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

When buying a high chair, consider:

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

To reduce the risk of injury from high chairs:

- Always remember to place your baby in the five-point body harness to prevent falls.
- Supervise your child at all times.
- Keep the high chair away from appliance cords, curtain cords and anything else your 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

On average, 65 Victorian babies and infants per year need hospital treatment for injuries related to change tables. These injuries are usually caused by a baby falling from a height of 1.5 metres or less. Around one in four baby furniture-related injuries that require hospital treatment involve change tables.

A change table should be sturdy and 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, with smooth edges.
- No gaps that could injure your baby's fingers or toes.

When using a change table:

- Consider whether you need to use a change table or if you can change your baby on a large towel or changing mat on the floor instead.
- Have everything you need to change your baby ready and within reach.
- Never leave your baby alone.
- Always keep one hand on your baby.
- Ignore interruptions, or take your baby with you if you have to leave the room.
- Use a safety harness.

Playpens

Playpens can be used to put young children in for short periods, such as when cooking or on the telephone. When buying a playpen, consider:

- Children as young as nine months of age can pull themselves up into a standing position, so make sure the playpen is sturdy.
- 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 or dragged around from inside.
- 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 well clear of heaters, stoves and power points.
- Keep the playpen away from blind and curtain cords as these may become caught around your baby's neck.

Dangerous furniture

The following items are unsafe and should not be used:

- **Baby walkers** - On average, 13 Victorian children per year need hospital treatment for injuries related to baby walkers. The use of baby walkers is generally not recommended. They are banned in some countries. Walkers do not help babies learn to walk and can actually interfere with normal development. 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 greater risk of scalds and poisoning.
- **Toy boxes with heavy lids** - A child might have the strength to open the lid of a toy box, but not to hold it. Children can be injured if a heavy lid closes suddenly. Children younger than two years old are most at risk. A special slow-closing hinge on the toy box can prevent finger jams, or better yet choose a toy box without a lid. If you buy a toy box with a lid, the lid should be lightweight and removable. Children like to hide in items such as toy boxes and there have been cases where children have been trapped inside. Provide ventilation holes in toy boxes to prevent suffocation. If a toy box has a lock or latch, 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
- Product Safety Australia
- 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

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