

Child safety - at home

Home is a special place when you are growing up. It's a place to explore, to have adventures and to play. The home is also the most common place for young children to be injured.

Most accidents are predictable and preventable. Try to make the home environment as safe as possible before your baby arrives and again before your child starts crawling.

You must always ensure the inside of your home is safe. You must also consider hazards found in outdoor areas, particularly the driveway, front and rear gardens, pool and barbeque areas, garden sheds, play areas and cubby houses.

Make your home safe for toddlers

One of the best ways to reduce the risk of injury is to make some physical changes to the house. Look at your home and think about what the obvious risks and hazards are. Remove the risk or hazard, if possible, or add a safety product to minimise the chance of injury. For example, if you have a low table with sharp corners, you can attach corner covers or you can simply remove and temporarily store the table elsewhere.

Before considering what safety products you need, remember you can always change the layout of a room to help create a safer environment. If you are building or renovating your house, you can incorporate specific safety features in your design. The time to start making some changes or additions is well before your baby begins to crawl.

Choose carefully from a range of safety products

There is a range of safety products available. Be selective and choose safety products that:

- Suit your particular situation
- Are appropriate to your child's age
- Are affordable.

Some products are essential for your home, such as a first aid kit. Others are mandatory (required by law), such as smoke alarms and a pool fence. The following products are also worth considering.

Door and stove barriers

Use a door barrier or a safety gate to keep a young child out of the kitchen, particularly at busy times such as when dinner is being prepared. A safety gate/barrier will allow children to play safely in an adjacent room, but still enables you to see what's happening on the other side.

Door barriers are also an important safety feature for both the top and bottom of stairs. You can buy barriers to fit doorways or open spaces of various sizes.

One of the most dangerous parts of the house is the kitchen. Injuries relating to the stove and oven can be very serious. **A stove guard fitted around the hot plates can protect children from serious scald or burn injury caused when pots and pans are pulled down on top of them.** Stove knob covers can be purchased to make it difficult for a child to turn a stove or oven on. Alternatively, you may be able to remove the knobs altogether.

Locks and safety catches

There are many dangerous chemicals and cleaning products kept in the kitchen, laundry and medicine cabinet. Ensure these are put away immediately after use and stored in a locked or out-of-reach cupboard greater than 1.5 metres high.

There are various locks, catches and latches that can be attached to a variety of cupboards and drawers. A plastic catch may be sufficient to use on a cupboard or drawer containing crockery. However, a plastic catch is not adequate if the items are poisonous. A magnetic lock or 'elbow catch' offers greater protection. Alternatively, you can purchase a small lockable poisons cabinet to store medications and a large lockable cabinet to store cleaning products.

Other safety products

There are many more safety products available for purchase:

- **Safety tap caps** – are designed to prevent children from turning on a hot tap which results in household hot water burns and can be easily installed without the assistance of a plumber or handyman.
- **Finger protection strips** – are an innovative yet simple design to prevent children from trapping their fingers between the door and door hinge.
- **Power point covers** – prevent electrocution from open power sockets by covering the point and preventing objects being poked into them.
- **Doorknob covers** – make it difficult for children to open a door and prevent them from entering a room.
- **Blind cord windups** – can help prevent strangulation by ensuring long cords are not left dangling.
- **Foam doorstoppers** – help protect little fingers from being jammed in doors.

The Royal Children's Hospital Child Health and Safety Resource Centre has a comprehensive range of specialised safety products and parenting books. Staff can also offer individual advice to families.

Home safety check

For a more detailed step-by-step guide to safety in your home and surroundings, complete the RCH Safety Centre Home Safety Checklist, which is available from The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre and can be accessed from the website.

Remember that every home is different, so contact the RCH Safety Centre telephone advisory line on (03) 9345 5085 for advice on specific action plans and safety products for your home.

Where to get help

- The Safety Centre Telephone Advisory Line, The Royal Children's Hospital Tel. (03) 9345 5085
- Child Health and Safety Resource Centre, The Royal Children's Hospital Tel. (03) 9345 6429

Things to remember

- Home is the most common place for children to be injured.
- The best way to reduce the risk of injury is either to remove a potential hazard or dangerous item, or add a suitable safety product.
- Many safety products are available, but it helps to speak to an expert about your specific needs.

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

Royal Childrens Hospital - Safety Centre

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