

Child safety - reducing injuries

You can never completely 'child-proof' your home. You **can** dramatically reduce the risk of injuries, however, by making a few changes to your home and keeping your child under constant supervision.

Emergency medical treatment for young children or babies isn't always the same as for adults. All parents and carers should ensure they have current training in paediatric (child) first aid. Plan to do a CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) refresher course once a year; first aid practices sometimes change and there is a tendency to forget when skills are not used regularly.

Never hesitate to call an ambulance if your child is injured. Throughout Australia, the emergency number to ring is triple zero (**000**).

Drowning

Drowning is the leading cause of death for children under five years of age. One and two year olds are most at risk. The majority of toddler drowning deaths in Victoria (2001–06) occurred in bathtubs (29%), dams (19%), home pools (14%) and ponds (14%). For every toddler drowned, there are seven non-fatal drowning or immersion incidents requiring hospital treatment. All Australian swimming pools are required by law to be fenced.

Safety suggestions to prevent drowning include:

- Never leave your child alone in the bath. An adult must remain within arm's reach of a young child in the bath.
- At the beach, teach children to swim between the flags.
- Make sure children are within constant visual contact of an adult at all times when near any kind of water.
- Secure wire mesh of an appropriate gauge over fishponds, aquariums or birdbaths.
- Teach your child to swim. Lessons are recommended from four years of age.
- It is a good idea to have a resuscitation chart by the phone and on the pool fence.

Falls

Falling is the most common cause of injury for children of all ages. The seriousness of an injury depends on the height the child falls from, what surface the child falls onto and what the child may hit as they fall. A standing and toddling baby also has frequent minor falls. To minimise falls injuries, look at the environment from your child's level.

Safety suggestions include:

- Create a clear area for play by removing tripping hazards such as rugs and electrical cords. Pad sharp corners of benches and tables or remove them from the play area.
- Never carry your baby around in a bouncinette or rocker chair. Put bouncinettes on the floor, not on a table or high surface.
- Change tables should have ends and sides that are raised at least 100mm to prevent your baby from falling. Have everything ready before you place your baby on the change table.
- Never leave a baby unsupervised on a change table. Consider changing your baby on a large towel on the floor.
- Do not use baby walkers. They give a young child the mobility to place them in danger quickly and unexpectedly.
- Always use a full body (five-point) safety harness in prams, strollers, high chairs and shopping trolleys.
- Don't allow a child to walk or run while carrying sharp objects such as scissors.
- Use a safety gate at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Use a sensor light for stairs and steps.
- Put non-skid rubber mats in the bath and shower.

- Make sure that a child can't open and fall out of any windows.
- Make sure swings, slides and climbing equipment have soft fall material underneath, to a depth of 300mm.

Fire

By law, all homes must have working smoke alarms installed. Change the batteries in smoke alarms every year at the end of the daylight saving period and test them weekly. Keep children away from fires, flames and hot surfaces or liquids.

Safety suggestions include:

- Install a fixed guard at least 70cm high around all heaters, open fires, radiators and potbelly stoves. If any surface is so hot that you cannot leave your own hand on it for ten seconds, it needs a guard to prevent contact burns to young children.
- Lock matches, cigarette lighters and flammable liquids away.
- Keep a fire blanket and a dry powder extinguisher in the kitchen and make sure you know how to use them. Fire blankets must be at least one metre from the stove. Your fire extinguisher is best located near the kitchen entrance.
- Install a safety switch to prevent electrocution.
- Use power boards; they are safer than double adapters.
- Choose close-fitting nightwear for children with the label 'styled to reduce fire danger' or 'low fire danger'.
- Have a fire exit plan and practise it with all the family. Make sure there are two ways out of the house. It is also important to have two means of exit from each room.
- Teach your child to stop, drop, cover and roll on the floor if their clothing catches on fire. Also teach them to crawl low in smoke to the nearest exit, to avoid smoke and poisonous gases. Reinforce this with your child when you are practising a fire drill.

In an emergency, call triple zero (000). For information about fire safety and fire-proofing your home, call the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) on (03) 9665 4464 or the Country Fire Authority (CFA) on (03) 9262 8444.

Poisoning

Young children tend to put every object they find into their mouths. In Victoria, at least eight children a day receive medical attention after swallowing a poison. Children under five years of age are most at risk, especially those between one and three years. Household products and medicines are the most common causes of poisoning in children. The most serious poisonings usually involve medicines.

Safety suggestions to prevent poisoning in children include:

- Keep **all** medicines out of the reach and out of sight of your child. Put them safely away immediately after purchase or use.
- Only remove a medicine from its packaging when you are just about to take it - do not leave medicines unattended on benches or other places your child could reach.
- Store medicines and dangerous household products in cabinets or cupboards with a child-resistant lock, at least 1.5m above the ground. Dangerous products include drain cleaners, oven cleaners, dishwasher powders, bleaches, paints, many gardening products and other household chemicals. Child resistant locks can be installed on most cupboards.
- Read warning labels and directions for use carefully.
- Leave medicines and chemicals in their original containers – do not transfer them into other containers such as drink bottles.
- Some garden plants are poisonous if eaten. The Victoria Poison Information Centre has a list of poisonous plants on their website.
- Teach your children never to pick up or touch any insects they find in the garden (such as bees, wasps or spiders).

If you think you or someone in your care may have been poisoned, stay calm. Immediately take the container to the phone and ring the Poison Information Centre on 131 126 for advice (24 hours a day, seven days a week).

Scalds

Burn injuries, including scald and flame burns, can result in permanent scarring, disfigurement and disability. Hot liquids cause two out of three burns. The more serious injuries result in long and repeated periods of hospital treatment, many skin graft operations and ongoing psychological trauma. A severe scald can kill a small child, since their skin is much more vulnerable than the skin of an adult.

Safety suggestions include:

- Keep hot drinks away from children and never have a child on your lap while you have a hot drink.
- Put all hot liquids and food in the centre of the table, away from the edges. Don't use a tablecloth – children can pull the edge of the tablecloth and spill hot fluids over themselves. Use non-slip placemats instead.
- Don't carry hot drinks when children are playing on the floor. When busy in the kitchen, use a playpen or safety gate to avoid your child getting underfoot.
- When running a bath for your child, run the cold water first and then add hot water to the required temperature. Children bathe at 37–38°C.
- Avoid hanging cords on electric kettles and other appliances. Use short or curly cords or a cordless jug.
- Turn all pot handles away from the edge of the stove. Use the back burners whenever possible.
- Install a stove guard around the hot plates to protect young children from scalds.

Microwave safety

Microwaving causes uneven heating within fluids and the temperature continues to rise for a short time after food is removed from the microwave. This makes it easy to misjudge the temperature of food or drink.

Safety suggestions include:

- Make sure the microwave is out of reach of children.
- Take care when heating liquids in a microwave. If no alternative is available, heat the bottle standing up without a cap for around 30 seconds (for a full bottle at full power). Replace the cap and teat, shake gently and allow the bottle to stand for 10–20 seconds.
- Test the temperature before offering a bottle to your baby. Remember, if the liquid feels warm to you it is too hot for your baby to drink.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- In an emergency, dial triple zero (000) for ambulance or fire brigade
- Victorian Poisons Information Centre (VPIC) Tel. 131 126, 24 hours, 7 days
- The Royal Children's Hospital, Safety Centre Tel. (03) 9345 5085
- The Resource Centre for Child Health and Safety Tel. (03) 9345 6429

For information about first aid courses:

- The Royal Children's Hospital, Safety Centre Tel. (03) 9345 5085
- Life Saving Victoria Tel. (03) 9676 6900
- Metropolitan Fire Brigade Tel. (03) 9665 4464
- Country Fire Authority Tel. (03) 9262 8444

Things to remember

- Always dial triple zero (000) in an emergency.
- Children and babies often need different emergency treatment than adults, so take a paediatric first aid course to keep your skills up-to-date.
- Keep your child under close supervision.
- You can reduce the risk of injuries by making a few practical changes to your home.

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

Royal Childrens Hospital - Safety Centre

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