
Child safety and injury prevention

Summary

- Always dial triple zero (000) in an emergency
 - Children and babies often need different emergency treatment than adults, so take a child (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.
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You can never completely ‘child-proof’ your home. You can, however, dramatically reduce the risk of injuries 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. If you are a parent or carer, make sure you have current training in child (paediatric) first aid.

Plan to do a CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) refresher course once a year – first aid practices sometimes change and it’s easy to forget how to do something when you don’t use the skills regularly.

Call triple zero (000) for an ambulance if your child is severely injured, has collapsed, stopped breathing, is fitting or is suffering an anaphylactic reaction.

Triple zero (000) is the emergency number to ring from anywhere in Australia.

Child safety – preventing drowning

Drowning is one of the leading causes of unintentional injury death for children under five years of age. One- and two-year-olds are most at risk as they are more mobile than infants, but are still developing motor skills and cannot judge hazards.

Swimming pools, baths and rivers, creeks and streams are the most common locations where toddler drowning deaths occur. For every Victorian toddler who drowns, there are ten non-fatal drowning or immersion incidents requiring hospital treatment. All Australian swimming pools with a depth greater than 30 cm are required by law to be fenced – this includes portable or toddler pools.

Safety measures to prevent drowning include:

- **Never leave your child alone in the bath.** Children can drown quickly and silently in a few centimetres of water.
 - **Actively supervise.** Make sure children are in constant visual eye contact and within arm’s reach of an adult at all times when in and around water.
 - **Be prepared.** When your child is in the bath, be within arm’s reach of them with all of your attention, all of the time. Be prepared with everything you need for bathing your child before entering the bathroom.
 - **Empty water** from the bath and from buckets and wading pools immediately after use, and close the bathroom door when it is not in use.
 - At the beach, **teach children to swim between the flags.**
 - It is illegal for pools and spas not to have a barrier around them. The type of barrier required depends on when the pool or spa was installed. Remove any objects which can be used to climb over the barrier and keep the gate closed at all times.
 - **Always watch your children at the public swimming pool.** An adult must be within arm’s reach of children under five years of age at all times. Remember, lifeguards are not babysitters.
 - Secure wire mesh of an appropriate rigid gauge over fishponds and aquariums.
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- **Teach your child to swim.** Water familiarisation and awareness classes are offered for children from six months of age.
- **Have a resuscitation chart** by the phone and in the pool or spa area.
- if you are a parent or caregiver, **do a first aid course**, and learn infant and child cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) in case of an emergency.

Child safety – preventing 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, the surface the child falls onto and what the child may hit as they fall. A standing and toddling baby has frequent minor falls. To minimise fall injuries, look at the environment from your child's level.

Safety suggestions include:

- Remove tripping hazards. Create a clear area for play by removing tripping hazards from the floor, such as toys, 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.
- Make sure your change table has ends and sides that are raised at least 10 cm to prevent your baby from falling. Keep one hand on your baby at all times. 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 put themselves 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.
- Safety gates help prevent falls. 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 swings, slides and climbing equipment have soft fall material underneath, to a depth of at least 30 cm. Only use bunk beds for children over nine years.

Window safety – preventing falls

Make sure that children can't open and fall out of any windows. Safety suggestions to prevent falls from windows include:

- Keep furniture away from windows.
- Install window locks to prevent windows from opening wide enough for a child to fit through.
- Install window guards. Insect screens do not prevent children from falling.

Child safety – preventing burns

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 monthly. Replace smoke alarms every 10 years. Keep children away from fires, flames, hot surfaces and hot liquids.

Safety suggestions include:

- Install a fixed guard at least 70 cm high around all heaters, open fires, radiators and potbelly stoves.
- Lock matches, cigarette lighters and flammable liquids away and out of reach of children.
- 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 stored at least one metre from the stove. Your fire extinguisher is best located near the kitchen entrance. It is important to always have the extinguisher between your exit point and source of possible fire. If you are not confident or able to use either the extinguisher or fire blanket and you experience a fire, evacuate immediately, closing the door behind you as you go.

- Install a safety switch to prevent electrocution.
- Use power boards as they are safer than double adapters.
- Choose close-fitting nightwear for children with the label 'styled to reduce fire danger' or 'low fire danger'.
- Prepare a **home fire escape plan** and practise it with all the family. Make sure there are two ways out of each room where possible, as well as out of the house.
- Teach your child that if their clothing catches fire they should:
 - **stop** running
 - **drop** to the floor
 - **cover** their face with their hands
 - **roll** on the floor to put the fire out.
- Teach your child that if there is a fire they should crawl low through the smoke to the nearest exit (get down low and go, go, go). This will help 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 in your home, call the **Metropolitan Fire Brigade** on **(03) 9665 4464** or the **Country Fire Authority** on **(03) 9262 8444**.

In case of burns and scalds, hold injured area under cool running water for a minimum of 20 minutes – never use ice, oil, butter or ointments. Seek medical attention if clothing is stuck to the burn site, the burn is on the face, hands, lap or feet, or if the burn is bigger than a 50 cent piece.

Child safety – preventing poisoning

Young children tend to put every object they find into their mouths. In Victoria, at least two children a day are treated in hospital due to poisoning. 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 cause of poisoning in children. (Dangerous products include drain cleaners, oven cleaners, dishwasher tablets and powders, bleaches, paints, many gardening products and other household chemicals.) The most serious poisonings usually involve medicines.

Safety suggestions to prevent poisoning in children include:

- Keep **all** medicines and household products out of the reach and out of sight of children.
- Put all chemicals, medicines and cleaning products away immediately after use.
- Store medicines and dangerous household products in cabinets or cupboards with a child-resistant lock at least 1.5 m above the ground. Child-resistant locks can be installed on most cupboards.
- Only remove a medicine from its packaging when you are just about to take or administer it – do not leave medicines unattended on benches or other places your child could reach.
- 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.
- Child resistant caps are not child proof – they are designed to be difficult for children to open but not impossible. Products using these caps still need to be stored up high out of the sight and reach of children, in a locked cupboard.
- Clean out your medicine cupboard regularly. Take unwanted and out-of-date medicines to your nearest pharmacy for proper disposal.
- Rinse empty containers of liquid medicines and household products with water before throwing them out.
- Refer to medicines by their proper names. They are not lollies.
- Avoid taking medicines in front of children. Children tend to imitate adults.
- Visitors' bags may contain medicines. Keep them well out of the reach of children.
- Avoid distractions when administering medicines; double check before administering them.
- If there are two or more people caring for a child, establish a 'checking system' with each other to avoid

giving double doses of medicine to children. Note the time and dose of medication given and keep this information with the medication pack or bottle.

- Be aware that the incidence of childhood poisoning increases when usual household routines are disrupted, such as moving house, being on holiday or having visitors.
- Remove or prevent access to poisonous plants in your garden or around the house. Some plants are poisonous if eaten. The **Victorian Poisons 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, given the wrong medicine or the wrong dose of medicine, or been bitten or stung by a bee, wasp, spider, jellyfish or other poisonous creature, try to stay calm.

Immediately call the **Victorian Poisons Information Centre** for advice on **13 11 26** (24 hours a day, seven days a week). Have the child with you, as well as the container for the substance you think they have been poisoned with. If they were bitten or stung by a creature, try to capture it in a jar for identification (if you can do so safely).

Child safety – preventing scalds

Burn injuries, including scald and flame burns, can result in permanent scarring, disfigurement and disability.

Hot liquids cause two out of three burns in small children. More serious scalding injuries may 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 sensitive than the skin of an adult.

Safety suggestions include:

- Keep children's play areas away from your kitchen.
- Keep hot drinks away from children and never hold a child while you have a hot drink.
- Keep children away from hot foods and liquids.
- Put all hot liquids and food in the centre of the table, or to the back of the bench 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 a safe temperature of 37–38 °C. Run the cold water last, as well, to cool the spout.
- Limit the hot water delivery temperature in bathroom outlets to a maximum of 50°C – if you are unsure of your hot water delivery temperature, a licenced plumber can assist in checking and setting this.
- Don't leave electrical cords from electric kettles and other appliances hanging in reach of children. Keep all cords well away from the edge. Use short or curly cords or a cordless jug.
- Turn all pot handles in and away from the edge of the stove. Use the back hotplates whenever possible.
- Install a stove guard around hotplates to protect young children from scalds.

Microwave safety and children

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 to 20 seconds.

- Test the temperature before offering a bottle to your baby. Remember, if the liquid feels very warm to you, it is too hot for your baby to drink.

Choking and harm caused by swallowing objects

Child safety to prevent swallowing and choking on objects includes:

- Be aware of foods that children can choke on, such as lollies, apple, meat and nuts.
- Do not give your child objects smaller than a 20 cent coin – children under three years can choke on things of this size.
- Be mindful of other household items which can pose a choking hazard including pen tops, hair ties, batteries and coins.
- Encourage children to sit calmly and not eat their meal too quickly.
- Check toys regularly for any small parts that can become a choking hazard.

Button batteries

Button batteries are found in many common household items including remote controls, calculators, bathroom scales, car keys, toys, watches, talking books or cards and flameless candles.

These coin-sized batteries can cause severe, life-threatening injuries in less than two hours if swallowed by children.

Take the following steps to protect children from swallowing button batteries:

- **identify** – identify items with button batteries in them
- **secure** – secure the battery compartment of those items
- **elevate** – keep loose or spare batteries and items containing button batteries out of reach of children
- **eliminate** – dispose of button batteries and items containing them (including packaging) safely.

If you think your child has swallowed or inserted a button battery into part of their body, take urgent action. Don't wait for them to show symptoms. Call the **Poisons Information Centre** on **13 11 26** for advice immediately.

More information about button battery safety is available on the [Kidsafe Victoria website](#).

Child safety – blinds and curtain cords

Go through every room in your home and check for any blinds or curtains with long cords that are either loose or looped. This includes any cords that are within children's reach at floor level or near furniture they can climb on. Remember:

- Make sure blind and curtain cords are not hanging anywhere within children's reach. Loose cords can easily wrap around and strangle children who are jumping, playing or climbing nearby.
- Secure any loose or looped cords with cleats or tension devices – these can be purchased from your local curtain and blind retailer or hardware store. Free safety kits can also be ordered from [Consumer Affairs Victoria](#).
- Do not put children's cots, beds, highchairs or playpens near a window where they can reach the blind or curtain cords. The cords can get around children's necks and strangle them while they are playing or sleeping.
- Do not place sofas, chairs, tables, shelves or bookcases near windows with corded blinds or curtains. Young children often like to climb onto furniture to look out the window. If they can reach the cords, they may quickly become entangled in them, lose their footing and suffer strangulation or serious injuries.
- Always supervise children in any rooms with reachable blind or curtain cords. Accidental strangulation can happen very quickly, so never leave children alone in these rooms, even for a short while. Secure any loose cords as soon as possible with cleats or tension devices.

Child first aid courses

For information about first aid courses contact:

- **The Royal Children's Hospital Community Information team** (formerly Safety Centre) Tel. **(03) 9345**

betterhealth.vic.gov.au

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- **Life Saving Victoria** Tel. **(03) 9676 6900**
- **St John Ambulance Australia** Tel. **(03) 8588 8590**

Fire safety courses

For information about fire safety contact:

- **Metropolitan Fire Brigade** Tel. **(03) 9665 4464**
- **Country Fire Authority** Tel. **(03) 9262 8444**.

Where to get help

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **Victorian Poisons Information Centre** Tel. **13 11 26** – seven days a week, 24 hours a day – for advice when poisoning or suspected poisoning occurs; mistakes with medicines; bites and stings and poisoning prevention information
- **The Royal Children’s Hospital Community Information team (formerly Safety Centre)** Tel. **(03) 9345 5085**
- The Royal Children’s Hospital, Kids Health Info Bookshop Tel. **(03) 9345 6429**
- **Kidsafe Victoria** Tel. **(03) 9036 2306**

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