
Child safety – at home

Summary

- Home is the most common place for children to be injured.
 - Always make sure you know where your children are before you reverse out of a driveway.
 - The best way to reduce the risk of injury in the home 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.
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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 injuries 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 make sure 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.

Driveway safety

In 2015, 85 children presented to The Royal Children's Hospital with driveway-related injuries. Ninety-two per cent of these accidents occurred in the driveway of the child's home – the rest occurred in the driveways of relatives or friends. Most of the drivers were unaware a child was near their vehicle.

Young children are particularly at risk (especially under six years of age) because:

- they can be impossible to see from inside a car, especially if they are immediately behind it
- they can move quickly and are unpredictable
- the rear and side vision from many cars has a large 'blind spot' which can easily obscure a child (in some cars this can be more than 15 metres)
- even if a car has parking sensors or a reversing camera fitted, children may not be noticed until it is too late to stop. During the school holiday period disruptions to the usual family routines (for example, visitors coming to visit your home) can increase children's exposure and the risk of a driveway run-over occurring. The basic message, especially for parents of children under six, is always make sure you know where your children are before you reverse out of a driveway.

Make your home safe for toddlers

One of the best ways to reduce the risk of injury is to make some physical changes around 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.

To assist you with identifying some possible hazards in and around the home, download the free [**Royal Children's Hospital home safety checklist**](#).

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. Incorporating safety features at the design point in the majority of cases will be much more economical than to amend and make safer at a later time. 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.

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 or barrier will allow children to play safely in an adjacent room, and enable 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. Make sure these are put away immediately after use and stored in a locked or out-of-reach cupboard at a height greater than 1.5 metres.

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.

Button batteries

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

These coin-sized batteries can cause severe life-threatening injuries if swallowed by children.

Parents and caregivers can take 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 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, call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 for advice immediately.

More information about button battery safety is available on the [Kidsafe Victoria](https://www.kidsafe.vic.gov.au) website.

Other safety products

There are many more safety products available for purchase, including:

- 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 Kids Health Info Bookshop 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 **Home Safety Checklist**, which is available from The Royal Children's Hospital Community Information team (formerly Safety Centre).

Remember that every home is different, so contact the RCH Community Information team (formerly 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 Community Information team** (formerly Safety Centre) Telephone Advisory Line, The Royal Children's Hospital Tel. (03) 9345 5085
- **Kids Health Info Bookshop**, The Royal Children's Hospital Tel. (03) 9345 6429
- **Kidsafe Victoria** - The Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia

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

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