

Children's Services

Home Safety

Every year in Australia, according to the Kidsafe organisation, around 300 children under the age of 14 are killed and 60,000 are hospitalised due to accidents. It's a sad fact that many of these could have been prevented. Children under five years are most at risk of unintentional injury – they account for around half of all child injury deaths.

Many of these accidents happen where children spend most of their time – at home. They are commonly caused by:

- falling – eg from tables, bunk beds, baby change tables
- swallowing poisons
- burns from hot water or fire
- drowning
- serious sunburn
- play injuries – eg bike riding
- rollerblading or skateboarding.

Why are young children more likely to get hurt?

Children under five don't really comprehend danger – even when you warn them. They are only able to think about one thing at a time, so when a young child sees a ball lying in the middle of the road, they will focus on getting the ball rather than think about the likelihood of being hit by a car. Their perception of how fast objects are moving is not well developed, so they might be unaware of cars and other traffic.

Active and curious, they can become so fascinated with the look, smell, taste and feel of things that they are likely to ignore potential injury.

What can I do to limit the risk to my child?

There are simple things you can do to ensure your children are safe in and around the home. Be prepared for emergencies by completing a first-aid course. Have numbers for poisons information (13 11 26) and emergency services (000) near the phone at all times – and your home address and phone number so babysitters can give them to the operator if needed. Have a well-stocked first-aid kit in the home and car and check that caps on liquid medications haven't 'gummed up' and are closed properly.

Help prevent injury through:

Electrocution:

- cover all power outlets with child safety plugs and unplug all electrical appliances when not in use

Fire/burns:

- keep matches, lighters, candles out of reach
- install good quality smoke alarms – check for the ideal locations – and keep keys in deadlocks when you're in the house to enable easy escape
- install an Earth Leakage Circuit Breaker in your fuse box to cut off the electricity supply if there is a fault
- use hot plate guards, keep appliance cords out of reach, and turn saucepan handles away from the edge of the stove
- keep hot drinks out of children's reach and do not hold children while drinking them
- when running a bath, put cold water in first then adjust the temperature with hot water, which should be less than 50°C (plumbers can install a device to ensure this)
- place safety guards around heaters and fire places

Poisoning:

- ensure all medications and cleaning, car and garden products are not accessible to children
- avoid taking medicines in front of children (they love to imitate adults) and refer to them properly – not as 'lollies'
- return old or unused medicines to your chemist, and ask visitors to keep any medicines they carry out of children's reach
- keep poisons in their original containers – eg storing them in soft drink bottles might entice children to drink them
- know what poisons you have – some common items (eg eucalyptus oil, iron tablets) can be dangerous to children

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Family Services

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Children's Services

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continued

- ask for and use products in child-resistant packaging – but remember, 'child-resistant' does not mean 'child-proof' – and check that caps are working
- remove poisonous plants (see below) and clear away garden rubbish that could hide poisonous spiders or snakes
- keep nappy buckets securely closed and out of reach of toddlers
- if swallowed, wash out child's mouth – do not try to make them vomit – and take the poison container with you to the phone when you phone 000 or the Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26, Australia-wide, 24 hours a day).

Falls:

- never leave babies unattended on change tables – check that you have everything you need before changing the nappy and if you need to leave for any reason, take baby with you
- fit child-proof gates at the top and bottom of stairs
- use straps in highchairs and prams/strollers
- never leave ladders lying against the house
- place soft fall under children's climbing equipment to lessen injuries

Drowning:

- always supervise children in the bath – if you need to leave the bathroom for any reason, take the child with you
- check gates and fences are adequate to keep unsupervised children from the pool, street or other dangers, and cover the fish pond with strong mesh

Choking:

- repair torn seats in highchairs, sofas etc to prevent children swallowing pieces of foam

Strangling:

- place cots and beds away from hanging cords as children can wrap these around their necks

Other:

- store children's toys in boxes with removable lids that won't trap children's fingers or necks if they get caught
- place protectors on all cupboards that children can reach, to avoid finger jams
- keep the dishwasher door locked and only fill the soap container when you use it – preferably when children are sleeping

- check toys for safety in case they are potentially dangerous or unsuitable for your child's age and abilities – refer to our *Toy Safety* fact sheet and the Melbourne Royal Children's Hospital's 'Toy safety for preschool' fact sheet (available at www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/safetycentre/03_Toy.pdf)
- lock away power tools when not in use and make sure your (gas) bbq cannot be turned on by children
- check where children are before backing the car out of the driveway or garage
- supervise children around pets to ensure they are not bitten, scratched or in contact with animal waste
- keep scissors and knives out of reach of children.

What if my child touches or tastes a poisonous plant?

The colour and smell of plants can fascinate young children, who might be tempted to eat the flowers, berries or leaves. If your child swallows a poisonous plant, the type and severity of symptoms will vary according to the plant, the amount swallowed and the size of the child. Look for symptoms such as vomiting, stomach cramps, irregular heart beat, burning to the mouth, skin allergies (rashes and hives), convulsions (fits) – and administer appropriate first aid:

- for skin contact, gently wash the skin with clear running water
- for eye contact, irrigate the eye with clear running water for 20 minutes
- if you need to go to hospital, take a piece of the plant with you if you can so that the hospital can identify the poison sooner. Consult the Children's Hospital fact sheet 'Poisonous Plants' www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/poisonous_plants.htm for further information.

IF YOUR CHILD IS HAVING DIFFICULTY BREATHING, IS UNCONSCIOUS OR 'FITTING', CALL AN AMBULANCE IMMEDIATELY ON 000.

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