

# Safety Article



The Utah Safety Council cares about your safety outside of the work setting. We offer resources that keep you and your loved ones safe at home, at play and on the go.

## PREVENTING CHILDHOOD AIRWAY OBSTRUCTION INJURIES

It only takes a few seconds for a child to pop a small object into his mouth and choke. With a few simple precautions you can protect children against these accidents. Every year around 1000 children under five years die from choking and suffocation. Many more are saved just in time. You can protect children, toddlers and babies from choking and suffocation by knowing what causes it.

**Preventing Food Obstruction:** To avoid choking, always supervise young children while they are eating, and keep small objects that are potential choking hazards out of their reach.

- Never leave a baby to drink their bottle by themselves. They could vomit or inhale the milk and choke.
- Babies should not be given any food they cannot chew properly. Large chunks are easily breathed in.
- When preparing food, remove small bones, for example from fish or chicken.
- Don't allow your children to eat anything while lying down.
- Avoid giving children dried peas and beans to play with.
- Teach older children not to give hard biscuits, crackers or candy to a young baby or toddler.
- Foods that may partially or completely block the windpipe include raw carrots and celery, peas, nuts, sunflower seeds, cherries with pits, watermelon with seed, popcorn and hard candy.
- Such foods as hot dogs, sausages and grapes can also cause choking because they are the right shape for blocking a child's windpipe. However, these foods can be served if they are chopped into small pieces.
- Peanut butter and chewing gum can also cause choking.

### Preventing Obstruction Around the Home:

- Get on the floor on your hands and knees, so that you are at your child's eye level. Look for and remove small items such as jewelry, coins, buttons, pins, nails and stones. Make a habit of picking up small items if they are lying around.
- To avoid suffocation by accidental hanging, make sure blind and curtain cords are out of reach of children. Tie up all window blind and drapery cords, or cut the ends and retrofit with safety tassels. The inner cords of blinds should be fitted with cord stops.
- Remove hood and neck drawstrings from all children's clothing.
- Never allow children to wear helmets, necklaces, purses, scarves or clothing with drawstrings while on playgrounds.
- In winter, use mitten clips instead of mitten cord and neck warmers instead of scarves to prevent any entanglement.
- Don't use toys with cords longer than seven inches.
- Make sure toys and other items children play with do not pose choking or suffocation hazards.
- Ensure that children play with age-appropriate toys, as indicated by choking hazard safety labels.
- Inspect old and new toys regularly for damage that may cause small pieces to break off.

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- Make sure toy chests have safety hinges, or no lids at all.
- Do not permit children access to household appliances where they could become trapped, such as refrigerators or dryers.
- Don't let children under age 8 blow-up balloons. Use Mylar balloons instead of latex balloons. If you must use latex balloons, store them out of reach of children, and deflate and discard balloons and balloon pieces of use.
- Keep small toys or toys with small parts away from babies until they are old enough to handle them. Parts broken off toys and games should be thrown away or be repaired. Also get rid of small pieces of crayon.
- The fine plastic used for packing mattresses, pillows, etc. is very dangerous. Never leave it lying around. Cut it up before throwing it away.
- Plastic bags can be lethal. Teach children never to put them over their heads - and do not allow little ones to play with them. Tie a knot in the bag for safety.
- Old fridges: Always remove the entire door or locking device before discarding old refrigerators. Children trapped when playing in a fridge will suffocate because it closes airtight.

## **Sleeping Environment Safety Remains Important for Children Up to Age Eight**

- Children under the age of eight should not be allowed to sleep on the top bunk of a bunk bed.
- Ensure that all spaces between the guardrail and bed frame, and all spaces in the head and foot boards, are less than 3.5 inches.

## **Emergency Treatment**

- Be prepared: Learn CPR and the Heimlich maneuver for infants and children.
- Do not panic if a child appears to be choking. Their normal cough reflex will generally expel the object.
- Do not try to remove the object with your fingers. This will only push it further down.
- If you suspect your child has inhaled an object or pushed beads or nuts up his or her nose or into their ears, get medical aid as soon as possible.
- If a child develops a chronic cough or wheeze, consider the possibility that he may have inhaled a foreign body into his air passage and take him to the doctor.
- If the child cannot breathe spontaneously after removal of the foreign object, apply mouth to mouth resuscitation.
- Seek expert advice from the child's primary care pediatrician.

*Sources: [www.childsafe.org](http://www.childsafe.org) and [www.usa.safekids.org](http://www.usa.safekids.org)*