

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.

SAFE AT HOME: PROTECT BABY FROM LESS OBVIOUS HAZARDS

For a young child, everything in a home is fair game. Cupboards hold tantalizing secrets, antique chests are made to be explored and dangling items beg to be yanked. But those cupboards also hold poisons, chests pose suffocation hazards, and dangling cords or clothes could bring down an avalanche of injuries.

Each year, 2.5 million children are injured from hazards in the home, many of which are preventable, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. In 2013, over 2,000 children four and younger were killed in the home, the National Safety Council said. The leading causes of those deaths were:

- Mechanical Suffocation, such as smothering by bed clothes or strangulation (1,000 deaths)
- Drowning, including swimming pools and bathtubs (300 deaths)
- Choking, (110 deaths)

Source: National Safety Council Injury Facts Publication, 2015 Edition

With the plethora of books and resources available to parents, most have the basics covered: outlet covers, safety gates, and carbon monoxide and smoke detectors. But many injuries occur in areas of which parents are less aware. “The problem with baby proofing and child safety is your child is not going to act in a predictable manner,” said Alison Rhodes, founder of Peek-a-Boo Baby proofing, a consulting and education group based in Wilton, CT.

Tumbles and Falls

“Rock-a-Bye-Baby” is a popular lullaby sung to babies, yet parents are not likely to wish for their own child to become a victim of the lyrics and come down, cradle and all. Falls can be serious and even deadly, especially out of a window. Rhodes recommended that parents begin baby proofing their homes before the child is born. Simple things like removing dangling tablecloths can stop a child from pulling dinner plates or other objects down. Rearranging furniture in a room away from windows can decrease the risk of a child climbing up and falling out.

Even if a screen is covering the window, a child is not safe and could still tumble out. “Screens keep the bugs out, but don’t keep the kids in,” said Kyran Quinlan, M.D., a pediatrician at University of Chicago Hospitals and a member of the Injury Free Coalition for Kids. If possible, open the top window of a double-hung frame instead of the lower one, Quinlan suggested. Not only will it be more difficult for a child to reach and fall out, but because heat rises, an open top window will ensure hot air escapes more readily.

In lieu of a double-hung window, guards are available that stop a window from being raised more than 4 inches- too narrow for a child to fall through. Other products include those similar to burglar bars that protect the child from falling out of the window but are easy to remove in case of a fire, Quinlan said. A fall is not limited to a window, though. If baby carriers or changing pads are not secured, a baby could wiggle and fall from a height, Rhoades said. Be sure to keep an eye on your child while in such a position, and make sure he or she is secured.

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Suffocation and Drowning

The number one cause of infant death in the home is suffocation through a mechanical means, according to the National Safety Council. The CPSC advises cutting window blind cords or tassels to prevent a child from accidental strangulation. Plastic bags and wrappers are able to form a tight seal if placed over the mouth and nose, so keep them away from children, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in Elk Grove Village, IL advises. While balloons are fun, as they should be likewise be kept away, as they can be inhaled into the windpipe and cause choking. The AAP warns parents that food or small objects also present choking hazards. Never let your children run or play while eating.

During the summertime and in warmer states, drowning is a huge concern for parents whose young children have access to backyard pools. All pools should be fenced in with a self-locking gate. But a pool is not the only place where a child is at risk of drowning, Quinlan said. Buckets filled with water from washing a car or from a recent rain also pose a drowning risk for young children. Be sure any buckets around the home are empty of water.

When a child turns 5 or 6 months old, he or she is able to sit up with support, enabling parents to wash their son or daughter in a tub with a bathing seat. But if left unattended, the child could tip over and drown in just a few inches of water, according to Quinlan. "Kids that age, they don't have the developmental abilities to get themselves out of a situation of a few inches of water," he said. Never leave a child alone in a bathtub, even for a moment.

Emerging Injury Trends

Much attention has been given to the temperature of tap water (maintain it cooler than 120 degrees F), but the bulk of scalding injuries now are unrelated to tap water, according to Quinlan. More children are now receiving burns related to food preparation, especially with the microwave oven becoming a staple kitchen accessory in the last 20 years, he said. "It's a serious problem, and the hazard of countertop microwave is something that's under a lot of people's radar screens," he said. Children are able to easily open the microwave door and remove recently heated contents, leaving themselves vulnerable to being scalded if the dish is spilled, Quinlan said. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children should never be left alone while in the kitchen. Turn off burners when not being used and never leave a hot oven door open. Create a "kid free" zone around the stove or oven with a playpen or high chair to prevent children from getting too close, the AAP said.

Another recent trend in child injuries has been related to toys containing magnets. The CPSC has issued several alerts and recalls on products in which tiny magnets have become loose from the toys. If more than one magnet is swallowed, or one is swallowed with a metal object, the pieces can attract to one another through intestinal walls, causing serious internal injury and even death. Check the CPSC Website for recalls on toys. Quinlan suggested children playing with magnetic toys not facing recalls do so, on a cookie sheet. That way if any magnets do come loose, they stay on the cookie sheet and do not get lost in the carpet, where young children could find and swallow them.

Parents should be wary of hand-me-down products, too, said Peek-a-Boo Baby proofing's Rhodes. Your old crib may not have nostalgic value, but it might not meet today's safety standards. When in doubt, it is safer to purchase newer products, she said.

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While parents may feel like there is an overwhelming amount of pitfalls and dangers in the home, Rhodes said they should focus “catastrophic” accidents. “You can’t baby proof an entire home, nor do you want to,” she said. “I think common sense goes a long way,” Quinlan said. “Focus on what could seriously injure a child rather than every little fall.”

Source: Family Safety and Health