

Childproofing Your Home

By
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Did you know that four out of ten unintentional injuries to kids happen in or around the home? Most of these injuries are preventable, not random accidents. Parents and caretakers can take precautions to improve home safety. The first step in keeping your child safe is to think about how he or she sees the world. As children develop, different things put them at risk.

- **Babies** do not know what danger is. They:
 - Can roll over and fall off changing tables or furniture
 - Are top-heavy and can fall down a lot
 - Like to explore and put things in their mouths
- **Toddlers** still do not know what danger is. They:
 - Explore even more
 - Are able to walk, jump, run, and climb
 - Are able to reach more places and go up and down stairs
- **Preschoolers** are not afraid of dangerous things and do not always know how they can get hurt. They:
 - Learn by watching, and they learn fast
 - Like to pretend, play, and climb

Now that you see how your child can be at risk, here's a reminder of what to look for when childproofing your home. Falls are the leading cause of injury to children ages birth to 4 years. Falls can range from tripping on the same level to falling off furniture to falls out of windows, off balconies, or down the stairs. Some tips to prevent falls include:

- Never leave an infant alone on a changing table, bed, couch, or chair
- Always keep a hand on a baby when changing a diaper
- When babies and toddlers start to crawl and walk, block access to the stairs by installing a baby gate. Keep the gate at the bottom of the stairs and the top if they're going to be playing on both levels of the house
- Baby walkers are very dangerous and **should not** be used
- Furniture should be away from windows
- Install a window lock so that windows cannot open more than 4 inches
- Spaces between balcony rails should be covered by plastic sheeting if they are more than 4 inches wide

Choking and suffocation is the leading cause of death to infants in California. Actions to avoid choking and suffocation include:

- Roll up or cut window blind cords
- Keep small objects away from children, and cut food into very small pieces
- Make sure the slat between the crib are less than 2 3/8 inches apart so they can't put their head through
- Place your baby on his or her back to sleep
- Remove soft bedding and stuffed animals from cribs so they don't put their face on them and suffocate
- Remove hanging mobile toys from cribs once your child begins to reach for them

Poisoning prevention is very important. New recommendations from the American Medical Association say that it is best NOT to use Ipecac to induce vomiting after a suspected poisoning, but instead to call Poison Control right away. The number is: 1-800-222-2222. Other recommendations are to:

- Lock chemicals and cleaners up high and out of reach of children
- Have emergency phone numbers by the phone or on the refrigerator
- Keep plants high and out of reach- some can be poisonous
- Look at candy labels. Some candies from other countries contain lead and can be poisonous

Fire and burn prevention is also an issue. You can do some simple things to reduce risk such as turn down the hot water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit or lower to avoid scalds. If you rent, you may have to ask your landlord or manager about how to do this. Other suggestions are to:

- Always cook on the back burner with pot handles turned toward the back of the stove
- Keep hot liquids away from the edge of the table
- Keep matches and lighters in a locked drawer
- Do not heat baby bottles in the microwave
- Install outlet protectors in all outlets
- Be sure that all hair dryers and small appliances have a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter and are kept out of reach
- Test the water temperature before putting your child in the bath
- Put a smoke detector in the hallway outside of bedrooms
- Install a fireplace screen

Finally, small children can drown in just a tiny amount of water. Since they are top-heavy, they can fall into buckets or the toilet and not be able to get themselves out. Drowning prevention activities include:

- Empty all buckets and store upside down
- Put a toilet lock on the toilet lid
- Never use a bath chair

Childproofing your home is an important step in protecting your child from unintentional injuries. There are many things you cannot control in the world, but these actions will create a safer environment where your child can grow, learn, and develop. If you have any questions about home safety, please contact Beth Dadko and the Childhood Injury Prevention Program at 565-6680 or go to www.safekids.org for more information.