

CHILDHOOD SAFETY GUIDELINES

Birth to 10 Years

Children are exposed to many situations for which they are not prepared and need your protection from injury and even death. Guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics, summarized below, have been compiled to make you aware of potential dangers at each stage of your child's development so that you can take the necessary precautions and also to teach your child how to prevent accidents and injury.

This information should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on the individual facts and circumstances.

Birth to 6 Months

Children learn fast, and often injuries occur because parents are not aware of what their children can do. Here are some tips to help prevent injuries before they occur.

Car Injuries

Most car injuries and deaths from car crashes can be prevented by the use of car safety seats. Your newborn's first ride home from the hospital should be in a car safety seat, in the back seat in a rear-facing car seat.

- Make sure the car seat is installed correctly.
- Read and follow the instructions that come with the car seat and the owners' manual of your car on using car seats correctly.
- Use the car safety seat EVERY time your child is in the car.
- NEVER put an infant in the front seat of a car with a passenger air bag.

Falls

Babies wiggle, move and push against things with their feet soon after they are born. Any of these movements can result in a fall. As your baby grows he or she will be able to roll over and may fall off things unless protected. Babies may be able to crawl as early as 6 months.

- Do not leave your baby alone on changing tables, beds, sofas or chairs.
- Put your baby in a safe place such as a crib or playpen when you cannot hold him.
- Use gates on stairways and close doors to keep your baby out of rooms where he or she might get hurt.
- Install operable window guards on all windows above the first floor.
- Do not use a baby walker. Your baby may tip the walker over, fall out of it, or fall down stairs and seriously injure his head. Baby walkers let children get to places where they can pull heavy objects or hot food onto themselves.
- If your baby has a serious fall or does not act normally after a fall, call your doctor.

Burns

At 3 to 5 months babies will wave their fists and grab at things.

- NEVER carry your baby and hot liquids or foods at the same time! You may not be able to handle both!
- To protect your child from tap water scalds, reduce the maximum temperature of your hot water heater to 120° F.

If your baby gets burned, immediately put the burned area in cold water. Keep the burned area in cold water until he or she stops crying, then cover it loosely with a bandage or clean cloth and call your doctor.

To help prevent injury from a house fire, test the batteries on your smoke alarm every month to be sure that they work. Change the batteries every year on a date you'll remember, such as daylight savings time.

Choking

Babies explore their environment by putting anything and everything into their mouths.

- NEVER leave small objects within your baby's reach, even for a moment.
- NEVER feed your baby hard pieces of food such as chunks of raw carrots, apples, hot dogs, grapes, peanuts and popcorn.
- Cut all the foods you feed your baby into thin pieces to prevent choking. Be prepared if your baby starts to choke.
- Ask your doctor to recommend the steps you need to know. Learn how to save the life of a choking child.

Suffocation

To prevent suffocation and reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)

- Your baby should always sleep on his or her back.
- NEVER put your baby on a waterbed, beanbag, or anything that is soft enough to cover the face and block air to the nose and mouth.
- Keep plastic wrappers and bags away from your baby. They form a tight seal if placed over the mouth and nose and may cause suffocation.

6 to 12 Months

Your child is a fast learner and will suddenly be able to roll over, crawl, sit and stand. Sometimes children climb before walking or walk with support months before you expect. They will grasp at anything and reach things they could not reach before.

Falls

Because of your child's new abilities he or she will fall often and must be protected from injury.

As with younger infants:

- Use gates on stairways and doors.
- Install operable window guards on all windows above the first floor.
- Do not use a baby walker.

Additionally:

- Remove sharp-edged or hard furniture from the room where your child plays.

Burns

At 6 to 12 months children grab at everything.

- NEVER leave cups of hot beverages on tables or counter edges.
- NEVER carry hot liquids or food near your child or while holding your child.
- Keep your child away from the stove or grill while you are cooking, and away from a clothes iron, wall or floor heaters or other hot appliances.
- A safer place for your child while you are cooking, eating, cleaning or unable to provide your full attention is the playpen, stable high chair or crib.
- To protect your child from tap water scalds, reduce the temperature of your hot water heater to a maximum of 120°F.
- Test the batteries on your smoke alarms every month to be sure that they work. Change them at least once a year on a date you'll remember, such as daylight savings time.

If your child does get burned, put cold water on the burned area immediately. Then cover the burned area loosely with a bandage or clean cloth. Call your doctor for all burns.

Drowning

At this age your child loves to play in the water. Drowning can happen in less than 2 inches of water. Your child is never water-safe at this age.

- Empty all the water from a bathtub, pail or any container of water immediately after use.
- Keep the door to the bathroom closed.
- NEVER leave your child alone in or near a bathtub, pail of water wading or swimming pool or any other water, even for a moment.
- Stay within an arm's length of your child around water.
- If you have a swimming pool, now is the time to install a fence separating the house from the pool, before your child begins to walk. The pool should be fenced in on all 4 sides. Most children drown because they fall into a pool that is not fenced off from the house.

And Remember Car Safety

- The single most important way to protect your child from injury in a car accident is by correct use of a car safety seat every time your child rides in a car.
- The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat. In an emergency, if a child must ride in the front seat, move the vehicle seat back as far as it can go, away from the air bag.
- Before you back out of a driveway, walk behind your car to be sure your child is not behind the car. You may not see your child through the rear view mirror.

1 To 2 Years

At this age your child can walk, run, climb, jump and wants to explore everything. Because of all the new things he or she can do, this stage is a very dangerous time in your child's life. Children at this age cannot understand danger or remember "no" while exploring.

Falls

At this age children can walk well and start to climb, jump and run. A chair left next to a kitchen counter, table or window allows a child to climb to dangerously high places. Remember, your child does not understand what is dangerous.

As for younger children:

- Use gates on stairways and rooms that your child should not enter without supervision.
- Install operable window guards above the first floor.
- Remove sharp-edged furniture from the rooms your child plays and sleeps in.
- When riding a bike with your child in an infant bike seat, ALWAYS put an infant protective helmet on your child.

Poisoning

Children continue to explore their world by putting everything into their mouths, even if it doesn't taste good. Your child can open doors and drawers, take things apart and open bottles easily now. He or she can get into and on top of everything.

- Use safety caps on all medicines and toxic household products. Keep safety caps on at all times.
- Keep all household products and medicines completely out of sight and reach. Never store lye drain cleaners in your home.
- Keep all products and medicines in their original containers.
- Identify all plants inside the home and in the yard and find out whether or not they can be poisonous if ingested.

Burns

The kitchen is a dangerous place for your child during meal preparation. Hot liquids, grease and hot foods spilled on your child will cause serious burns. Children who are learning to walk will grab at anything to steady themselves, including hot oven doors, wall heaters or outdoor grills.

- It's best to keep your child out of the kitchen while cooking. A safer place for your child while you are cooking, eating or unable to give him your full attention is the playpen, high chair or crib.
- Keep your child out of rooms where there are hot objects that may be touched, or put a barrier around them.
- Your child will reach for your hot food or cup of coffee, so don't leave them within your child's reach.
- Don't carry your child and hot liquids or food at the same time.

If your child does get burned, put cold water on the burned area immediately. Then cover the burned area loosely with a bandage or clean cloth. Call your doctor for all burns.

Drowning

At this age your child loves to play in the water. Drowning can happen in less than 2 inches of water. Your child is never water-safe at this age.

- Empty all the water from a bathtub, pail or any container of water immediately after use.
- Keep the door to the bathroom closed.
- NEVER leave your child alone in or near a bathtub, pail of water wading or swimming pool or any other water, even for a moment.
- Stay within an arm's length of your child around water.
- If you have a swimming pool, now is the time to install a fence separating the house from the pool, before your child begins to walk. The pool should be fenced in on all 4 sides. Most children drown because they fall into a pool that is not fenced off from the house. You cannot watch your child every minute while he or she is in the house. It only takes a moment for your child to get out of your house and fall into your pool.

Remember Car Safety

- The single most important way to protect your child from injury in a car accident is by correct use of a car safety seat every time your child rides in a car.
- The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat. In an emergency, if a child must ride in the front seat, move the vehicle seat back as far as it can go, away from the air bag.
- Before you back out of a driveway, walk behind your car to be sure your child is not behind the car. You may not see your child through the rear view mirror.

Firearm Hazards

Children in homes where guns are present are in more danger of being shot by themselves, their friends, or a family member than of being injured by an intruder. It is best to keep all guns out of the home. Handguns are especially dangerous.

If you choose to keep a gun, keep it unloaded and in a locked place separate from the ammunition. Ask if the homes where your child visits or is cared for have guns and how they are stored.

2 to 4 Years

Before you know it your child is jumping, running, riding a tricycle and using tools. At this age children are at special risk for injuries from falls, drowning, poisons, burns and car crashes. Your child still does not understand dangers or remember "no" while playing and exploring.

Falls

Because your child's abilities are so great now, he or she will find an endless variety of dangerous situations at home and in the neighborhood. Children can fall off play equipment, out of windows, down stairs, off a tricycle and off anything that can be climbed on.

- Be sure the surface under play equipment is soft enough to absorb a fall. Use a rubber mat, or 12 inches of sand, sawdust or wood chips underneath play equipment.
- Lock doors to any dangerous areas.
- Fence in the play yard.
- As with younger children, use gates on stairways, install operable window guards above the first floor and remove sharp-edged furniture from the rooms your child plays and sleeps in.
- Teach your child the habit of ALWAYS wearing a helmet when riding a tricycle.

Firearm Hazards

Children in homes where guns are present are in more danger of being shot by themselves, their friends, or a family member than of being injured by an intruder. It is best to keep all guns out of the home. Handguns are especially dangerous.

If you choose to keep a gun, keep it unloaded and in a locked place separate from the ammunition. Ask if the homes where your child visits or is cared for have guns and how they are stored.

Burns

The kitchen can be a dangerous place for your child, especially when you are cooking. If your child is under foot, hot liquids, grease, and hot foods can spill on her or him and cause serious burns. Find something safe for your child to do while you are cooking.

Remember that kitchen appliances and other hot surfaces such as irons, ovens, wall heaters and outdoor grills can burn your child long after you have finished using them. To prevent tap water scalds, reduce the temperature of your hot water heater to 120° F.

If your child does get burned, immediately put cold water on the burned area. Then cover the burn loosely with a bandage or clean cloth. Call your doctor for ALL burns.

Poisonings

Children at this age will be able to open any drawer and climb anywhere curiosity leads. They may swallow anything they find. Use only household products and medicines that are absolutely necessary and keep them safely capped and out of sight and reach. Keep all products in their original containers.

If your child does put something potentially poisonous in his or her mouth, call the Poison Help Line immediately. Attach the Poison Help Line number (1-800-222-1222) to your phone. Do not make your child vomit.

And Remember Car Safety

- The single most important way to protect your child from injury in a car accident is by correct use of a car safety seat every time your child rides in a car.
- The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat. In an emergency, if a child must ride in the front seat, move the vehicle seat back as far as it can go, away from the air bag.
- Before you back out of a driveway, walk behind your car to be sure your child is not behind the car. You may not see your child through the rear view mirror.

5 Years

At age 5 your child may be learning to ride a bicycle or cross a street. Although children learn fast, they still cannot judge what is safe. You can prevent common major injuries by taking a few simple steps.

Bike Safety

- Your child should always wear a helmet when riding a bike.
- Never let your 5-year-old child ride a bike in the street.
- Be sure that the bike your child rides is the right size.
- Your 5-year-old child's bike should have coaster brakes, not hand brakes.

Refer to the section on bicycle safety for complete information about helmets and accident prevention.

Street Safety

Your child is in danger of being hit by a car if he or she darts out into the street while playing.

- Take your child to a playground or park to play.
- Show your child the curb and teach him or her to always stop at the curb and never cross the street without a grown-up.

Water Safety

Now is the time to teach your child how to swim.

- Even if your child knows how to swim, NEVER let him or her swim alone.
- Do not let your child play around any water (lake, stream, pool or ocean) unless an adult is watching.
- NEVER let your child swim in canals or any fast-moving water.
- Teach your child never to dive into water unless an adult has checked the depth of the water.
- When on any boat ALWAYS make sure your child is wearing a life jacket.

Fire Safety

- Teach your child not to play with matches or lighters.
- Keep matches and lighters out of your child's reach.
- Do not smoke in your home. Many home fires are caused by a lit cigarette that has not been put out completely.
- Remember to check smoke alarm batteries every month and to change them once a year.

Firearm Hazards

It is best not to have guns in the house at all. If you choose to keep a gun, keep it unloaded and locked in a place separate from ammunition. Ask if the homes where your child visits or is cared for have guns and how they are stored.

And Remember Car Safety

- Correctly use a car safety seat or booster seat for your child.
- Seat belt your child every time he or she rides in the car.
- The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat.
- Set a good example: make sure all adults in the car buckle up.

6 Years

Injuries are the greatest threat to the life and health of your child. They are the leading cause of death of school-aged children, yet most major injuries can be prevented.

At age 6 your child will become more independent and will be able to do more things that are dangerous. Six-year-olds may try to prove that they are grown-up, but they still aren't good at judging sound, distance or the speed of a moving car. Your child can learn a few simple things to do for protection, but you must still be in charge of his or her safety.

Fire Safety

- Make an escape plan in case of fire in your home. Your fire department can tell you how. Teach your child what to do if the smoke alarm rings, and practice what you both would do if there were a fire.
- Do not smoke in your home. Many home fires are caused by a lit cigarette that has not been put out completely.
- Install smoke alarms in your house and test the batteries every month to make sure they work. Change the batteries once a year.

Firearm Hazards

As with younger children, it is best not to have guns in the house at all. If you choose to keep a gun, keep it unloaded and locked in a place separate from ammunition. Ask if the homes where your child visits or is cared for have guns and how they are stored.

Bike Safety

- Make sure your child wears a helmet every time he or she rides a bike.
- Never let your 6-year-old ride in the street.
- See complete information about bike safety on this website.

Street Safety

- Never let your child play near the street. He or she may dart out into traffic without thinking. The park or playground is the best place to play.
- Teach your child never to cross the street without a grown-up, but also begin to teach safe street habits. Teach your child to stop at the curb, look to the left and to the right and back to the left again.

8 Years

At age 8 children are now taking off on their own. They look to friends for approval. They try to do daring things, and they may not want to obey grown-up rules. But they can learn safety rules with your help and reminders.

Sports Safety

- Ask your doctor which sports are right for your child.
- Be sure your child wears all the protective equipment made for the sport, such as shin pads, mouth guards, wrist guards, eye protection or helmets. Your child's coach also should be able to help you select protective equipment.

Water Safety

- An eight-year-old child is not safe alone in water, even if he or she knows how to swim.
- Do not let your child play around any water (lake, stream, pool or ocean) unless an adult is watching.
- Never let your child swim in canals or any fast-moving water.
- Teach your child to always enter the water feet first.

Bike Safety

- Make sure your child always wears a helmet when riding a bike.
- Now is the time to teach "Rules of the Road". Make sure your child knows the rules and can use them.
- Watch your child ride to see if he or she is in control of the bike and uses good judgment.
- Your 8-year-old is not old enough to ride at dusk or after dark.

Car Safety

- Your child should use a booster seat until the lap belt can be worn low and flat on the hips and the shoulder belt can be worn across the shoulder rather than the face or neck (usually at about 80 pounds and about 4 feet 9 inches tall).
- NEVER start the car until you've checked to be sure that your child is properly restrained.
- Be sure you and all passengers are buckled up, too.
- Install shoulder belts in the back seat if they are not there already. Serious injuries can occur with lap belts alone.
- The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat of the car.

10 Years

At age 10 children will do more things away from home. They will spend more time on a bike or in a car and will not see the need for adults to watch over them. It is important to continue to remind your child of how to remain safe.

Firearm Hazards

- It is best to keep guns out of the house.
- If you choose to keep a gun, keep it locked up, and keep ammunition in a separate place.
- Ask if the homes where your child visits have guns and how they are stored.
- Talk to your child about guns in school or on the streets.
- Find out if any of your child's friends carry guns.

Sports Safety

- Ask your doctor about age-appropriate sports
- Be sure your child wears the protective equipment made for the sport he or she plays.

Car Safety

- Your child must always buckle up when riding in any car. Ask your child to remind you, too.
- Booster seats should be used until the lap belt can be worn low and flat on your child's hips and the shoulder belt can be worn across the shoulder rather than the face or neck (usually at about 4 feet 9 inches tall and between 8 and 12 years).
- Shoulder belts should be used both in front and back seats. Serious injuries can happen when a lap belt is used alone.
- The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat.

Bike Safety

Your child may want to ride his or her bike further away from home.

- Be sure your child knows the "Rules of the Road".
- Be sure your child can handle a bike safely.
- Be sure your child always wears a bike helmet.
- It is still dangerous for your child to ride at dusk or after dark.

