

Baby Safety

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September is Baby Safety Month, time to remind parents and caregivers to make safe spaces for babies at home, at play, and on the way. The greatest gift you can give your baby is a safe environment.

Although your home should be a safe haven for your baby, it can be dangerous. Babies face a lot of potential injuries – including choking, drowning, falls, poisons, and burns – that can overwhelm any parent. Yet each of these risks can be reduced by taking simple, time-tested steps.

There are two steps everyone can take to protect children at home. First, childproof your home. The best way to find the dangers your child might encounter is to explore your home at the baby level, by getting down on your hands and knees. Cover every room, asking your self what looks tempting and what is within reach of your baby or toddler. Also check carpets and underneath furniture for hidden dangers such as pins, small toys, or coins.

Second, understand that childproofing can never be 100 percent effective. That is why it is so important to supervise your children at all times, especially around water, in the kitchen and bathroom, and where ever known hazards exist.

In the event of an emergency, post emergency numbers by the telephones. Post phone numbers for the poison control center (1-800-222-1222), your child's physician, the police and fire departments, and a close neighbor. Keep first aid supplies on hand – many inexpensive first aid kits are readily available at most stores. And consider taking an emergency aid or CPR class (locally, contact the CPR Center, at 342-3602), or ordering a Choking/CPR poster for your home from the American Academy of Pediatrics (\$2.95, at www.aap.org).

Beware of hidden choking hazards in your home. Every year there are between one and two dozen choking deaths in small children in the U.S. Most involve small objects not intended for use by young children, but that accidentally end up in their hands and mouths, such as balloons, small toys, toys parts, balls, and marbles.

Keep such objects off the floor and out of the reach of babies and toddlers. Follow labels that give age recommendations, which are based on safety concerns. Teach older children to keep their small toys away from younger children. Check the floors and under the furniture regularly. And check the eyes and noses of stuffed animals to ensure they are properly secured.

In the nursery, remove pillows, soft bedding, and toys from the crib. Put your baby “back to sleep” on a firm mattress, and never on a quilt, waterbed, or egg-crate or pillow-top mattress. Beware of old cribs, which may have sharp edges, corner post protrusions, and dangerously spaced slats which can be deadly. Keep cribs, and low-standing furniture such as beds, bookshelves, toy boxes and chairs away from windows and furniture. Install guards on windows that you will open, and tie up the cords on curtains and blinds to prevent strangling.

In the bathroom, lock medicine cabinets, and remove any razors, scissors, and hair dryers from the reach of small children. In drawing a bath, mix hot and cold water together, and test the temperature before putting the baby in. Set your hot water heater to 120 degrees to help reduce

the risk of scald burns – it takes just three seconds for a child to sustain a third-degree burn from water at 140 degrees. And never leave a baby alone in the bath.

In the kitchen, keep hot liquids, cleaning products, glassware, knives, electrical cords, and small appliances out of the reach of small children. Keep placemats and tablecloths out of reach, and away from the edge of counters and tables. Never let children under age two years eat small, round, or hard foods such as hot dogs, grapes, hard candy, nuts, or popcorn. And never leave a hot stove unattended – always use the back burners on the stove, and turn pot handles toward the back of the stove.

Around the house, cover all unused electrical outlets, and check for fire hazards. Look for frayed electrical wires or flammable materials near heat sources such as space heaters. Never run electrical cords under rugs. And make certain that your home, and any home your child visits, has working smoke alarms in every sleeping area, and on every level.

Use safety gates at the top and bottom of stairs to keep babies and toddlers out of harm's way. Never allow your baby to use a mobile baby walker – these are one of the leading causes of injury in the first year of life, and they may delay your baby from walking!

If firearms are kept in the house, keep them locked, unloaded, and stored out of reach. Secure ammunition in a separate, locked location.

Young children love to climb on furniture and use drawers and shelves as steps. However, children can sustain crush injuries as furniture can easily tip over on them. Secure bookcases, shelving, and heavy furniture to walls with brackets and anchors. When storing items, put heavier items on bottom shelves, and in bottom drawers.

Finally, in the car, parents are reminded that babies under one year of age and 20 pounds must ride in a rear-facing car seat, reclined at a 45-degree angle. For more information about the correct use of an infant safety seat, closely read to the user manual, or read more online at: www.aap.org, or www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

Everyday life is full of well-disguised dangers for children. By adulthood, we've hopefully learned to navigate this minefield so well that we no longer think of things like scissors and stoves as hazards. But to protect your child from the dangers she'll encounter in and out of your home, you have to see the world as she does, and you must recognize that she cannot yet distinguish hot from cold, or sharp from dull.