

Falls and young children

Information for parents and caregivers

Tips to prevent serious falls

Tip 1: home and backyard

Most serious falls in young children happen in the home. Look around your house and backyard using the 'Kisafe Home Safety Checklist'. Ask grandparents to also check their home using the 'Kisafe Grandparents Home Safety Checklist'. Attend to any dangerous situations that may cause serious injury for your young child, especially fall hazards.

Tip 2: stairs and windows

Take special care to protect young children who live in flats/apartments/two-story houses from stair and window falls. Add stair gates/guards. Remove furniture in front of windows. Add protective window guards. Children falling from windows are most likely to be male, younger than 3 years of age, and playing unsupervised at the time of the fall.

Tip 3: playground

Always supervise young children when they are using playground equipment. Teach your child to use the play equipment safely and sensibly. Provide a soft landing surface, underneath and around play equipment. Use loose-fill surfacing such as wood chips or well watered lawn. Protective surfacing under and around playground equipment can prevent and reduce the severity of fall-related injuries. Be aware of the 'fall zone' around each piece of equipment where your child may fall or exit from the equipment. Install secure footings on play equipment to improve stability. Anchor playground equipment to the ground and place it below the play surface to reduce tripping hazards.

Tip 4: shopping trolleys

Always stay close to the shopping trolley and keep a close eye on your child. Use safety belts/harnesses when available to restrain your child in trolley seats. Never let your child stand up in the cart.

Falling is a normal part of a young child's development as they learn to walk, climb, jump, run and play. Fortunately, most children who fall are not injured, other than a few bruises and scrapes.

However, falls are the most common cause of admission to hospital for children 0–4 years of age. Children living in country areas are admitted to hospital for falls at a rate of 1.5 times more than children living in metropolitan areas.

In Australia, the annual health care costs of falls in children are estimated to be over \$130 million.

Broken bones in the arms and legs are the most common type of injury from falls. Falls are also the leading cause of traumatic brain injury (head injury) in young children.

Children are more at risk of serious injury if they fall from a height greater than 2 metres. The higher the drop, the more likely it is that the injury will be severe, particularly if the ground they fall onto is hard.

For children 0–4 years of age, the majority of falls are from ordinary, everyday items such as:

- Furniture: mainly beds, bunk beds, chairs, couches, change tables/benches, prams and cots.
- Playground equipment: mainly climbing apparatus, swings and trampolines.
- Buildings and trees.
- Skateboards and bikes.
- Stairs.
- Windows.
- Shopping trolleys.

It is also common for young children to receive injuries if they are dropped while being carried.

Strategies to prevent falls by age group

Childhood injuries are not usually 'accidents'. Most injuries can be predicted, and therefore prevented. It is the responsibility of adults to keep young children safe.

Infants younger than one year

- Never leave your child alone on counters, beds, tables, couches, or other high places.
- Always keep at least one hand on your child when changing nappies or dressing them.
- Keep cot sides up, and lower the base as the child grows.
- Keep harnesses or safety straps securely fastened when using a stroller, high chair, swing, infant carrier, or shopping cart.
- Baby walkers are not recommended because they may tip over or topple down stairs. Baby walkers are associated with more injuries than any other piece of baby equipment.
- Don't allow other children to hold or carry your child unless closely supervised.

Children one to four years of age

- Tell your young child what you are doing when you are keeping them safe, and why.
- As your child grows, teach them how to keep themselves safe.
- Teach your child to safely get off a chair or bed by sliding down on their tummy, feet first.
- If you live in a two storey house or flat or apartment, install sturdy gates at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Install operable window guards; keep the space in front of windows free of furniture.
- Keep doors to balconies locked.
- Playground surfaces must be soft, shock absorbing material such as bark chips or well watered lawn.

- Playground equipment should be in good repair and age-appropriate.
- Supervise your child closely when they are playing on slides, swings, and mini-trampolines.
- Hold your child's hand while climbing up or down stairs or riding escalators; teach your child to hold onto handrails to avoid falling.
- A bicycle should be in good repair and the correct size for the child.
- Never let your children ride a bicycle, tricycle or scooter without a properly fitted and secured helmet.
- If a child is riding on a bicycle with an adult, the child should be in a rear-mounted seat and wearing a helmet.
- If you have a tree that your child likes to climb, teach them how far to climb up, how to get down safely and have a rule that an adult always has to be with them when they climb the tree.
- A child with a disability needs more attention and supervision to avoid falls.

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