

Farm safety



The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre, Melbourne 2008

While farms are wonderful and endlessly fascinating places for children, they are also potentially dangerous places with a high risk of injury. They are places where children play, work and visit, and children are often exposed to activities and equipment which are unfamiliar to them.

Farms and rural properties are both a home and a workplace, therefore children may be placed at great risk when playing or helping out. Tragically around 20 children die each year on Australian farms as a result of injury.

The greatest risk for toddlers (0–4 years) is drowning accounting for around 35–40% of child farm deaths – most commonly in dams; but rivers, creeks, pools, troughs, dips and channels are also drowning hazards. For older children (5–14 years) working farm machinery, farm vehicles, motorcycles and horses are the biggest risks.

Children are much more likely to be hurt on a farm than in the city. Around one quarter of all child deaths were visitors to the farm.

This mix of home, work and recreation creates a complex environment, which compounds the risk to children. This risk can be minimised by taking some precautions.

Have a securely fenced house yard or 'safe play area' with child-resistant gates and latches to help prevent unsupervised access to farm hazards such as dams and farm vehicles; and ensure young children stay in this safe play area unless an adult is available to take them out on the farm and closely supervise them. If out and about on the farm with toddlers, supervision needs to be close and active enough for a child to 'hold my hand'.

In general

A fenced house yard or safe play area, helps make supervision that much easier. No supervision is perfect and there is no perfectly secure house/yard fence. However, a combination of safe play areas with close and active supervision will help reduce the likelihood of tragic events like a toddler drowning, occurring on farms and rural properties.

Establish some areas of the farm as being 'strictly out of bounds' and reinforce this consistently.

Make sure you know where young children are at all times, or make sure that someone responsible – not another child – is entrusted with constant supervision.

Provide hearing protection for children accompanying adults who are using chainsaws or other noisy farm equipment.

Water hazards

Provide a safe space outside with a secure fence that will help prevent toddlers and young children wondering away unnoticed into farm dams and waterways.

'Keep Watch'. Always supervise children when they are around water or if they could wander off into water. Do not let your toddler out of your sight – remember that toddlers can drown in only a few centimetres of water.

Make sure that pools are securely fenced and cover or fence dams, creeks, ponds, irrigation channels, tanks, wells, sheep dips and any other places where water accumulates.

After heavy rain, empty all containers around the farm. Are tanks, wells and troughs near the house fitted with lids/mesh and check that unused dips and ditches are filled in.

Teach children basic water safety and how to swim and explain the risk of diving into shallow or murky water.

Learn how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

Provide a safe play space outside that is fenced and easily seen from the kitchen.

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Safety Centre

Machinery and equipment

Tractors, machinery and children do not mix!

Tractors are especially dangerous for children. Encourage children to keep away from tractors and machinery on your farm or rural property. Prevent children from riding as passengers on tractors and machinery, even when not in use. Always leave the cabin locked. Tractors should be fitted with rollover protection bars.

Travel very slowly when near the house and other farm buildings and take special care when reversing.

Never leave any machinery running when not in use. Remove the keys and store them separately away from the tractor or machinery.

Make sure that all machinery is fitted with appropriate safety guards.

Workshops should always be kept locked and children only allowed to enter under close supervision.

Never let children ride in the back of utilities and make sure they are always wearing seatbelts or other restraints appropriate to their weight and size.

Make sure that storage bins, silos and underground tanks are secure to prevent access by young children.

Motorcycles

Motorcycles are the most common source of hospitalised farm injury to children.

Riders must always wear a correctly fitted motorcycle helmet, long pants, and sturdy footwear when riding farm motorbikes.

Make sure the motorbike is the appropriate size for the age of the child (e.g. child can lift the bike from the ground if it falls over and their feet touch the ground when astride the bike).

Children need to be appropriately trained and supervised when learning to ride two-wheeled motorcycles.

Follow the manufacturer's recommendations and do not allow children under 16 years old to ride ATVs (All terrain vehicles otherwise known as quads or four wheeled motorbikes), either as operators or passengers.

Chemicals

Have other hazards (e.g. chemicals, electrical, noise, silos) that children could access on your farm or rural property, been identified and addressed?

Store all chemicals in their original containers in a locked shed or cupboard.

Never store chemicals in food or drink containers.

When adults are using chemicals, read the labels, closely follow the manufacturer's mixing instructions and wear protective clothing.

Keep children away when spraying or using chemicals.

Animals

Keep young children away from animals unless they are closely supervised. Supervise young children when they are around any animals, including pet dogs.

When children are learning to ride horses, make sure that they are appropriately instructed and supervised. That they always wear a well fitting riding helmet and proper smooth-soled riding boots and match the horse with the child's ability and confidence – beginner riders should be matched with an older, quieter horse.

Keep aggressive animals such as bulls and stallions in paddocks that are secure and away from the house and areas where children play.

Teach children to wash their hands after handling or patting animals.

Keep the area around the house free from woodpiles and debris to discourage snakes and spiders.

Make sure all stockyards and paddocks where animals are kept are secure to prevent children entering.

Firearms

Store guns in locked steel cabinets securely bolted to the wall or floor.

Always store guns, magazines and bullets in separate locked places.

Always transport guns in locked containers.

Risk management

Remove the risk if possible by:

- Disposing of chemicals.
- Not keeping guns on the farm if possible.

Prevent children getting to the risk by having:

- A securely fenced safe play area (house-yard) for young children; fence off water areas near the house.
- No children as passengers on the back of utes.
- No children as passengers on tractors.
- No children on ATVs as either an operator or a passenger.

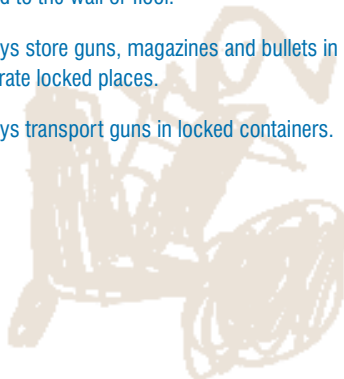
Minimise the risk

- Always closely supervise young children.
- Use appropriate car restraints.
- Wear helmets when riding, motorbikes and horses as well as other protective clothing and a helmet.
- Keep children away from animals including dogs.
- Undertake regular 'risk patrols' to identify potential hazards around the farm.
- Do a first aid course and learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

References and further information

Farmsafe Australia Inc.
Telephone: (02) 6752 8218
www.farmsafe.org.au

The 'Safe Play Areas on Farms' resource booklet (telephone (02) 6452 5297), has good ideas for keeping kids safe, active and engaged. A DVD is also available, featuring construction of a safe play area.



For further information
about the Safety Centre
Telephone 9345 5085

www.rch.org.au/safetycentre

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