

# Holiday safety



The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre, Melbourne 2008

All children and families look forward to holidays where they can relax and spend time together without the usual distractions of work and day-to-day routines. However the absence of the familiar home environment along with new activities and toys sometimes results in injuries. Here are some suggestions for ensuring a safe holiday.

## Getting there

If travelling by car, make sure that appropriate child car restraints are fitted and adjust them before you start. If the drive is a long one, stop at intervals to give the children a break and allow them to stretch their legs. Children get bored easily and can distract the driver; always have age appropriate toys or books that can occupy young minds, together with snacks and drinks. Dress the children in comfortable loose fitting clothes. It is sensible to plan driving during the cooler times of the day.

Never leave children or pets alone in the car, especially in hot weather. The temperature inside a car on a hot day can rise to dangerous levels very quickly.

## At the beach

- Always supervise children when they are near water. Never let young children out of your sight, no matter how calm or shallow the water – toddlers can drown in water that is only a few centimetres deep.
- All children should be taught to swim and learn safety near water. Toddlers can begin getting used to the water in supervised classes, though they are too young to be independent swimmers and to be left alone in water.
- Make sure that children only swim between the flags at beaches patrolled by lifeguards.
- Teach children the potential risks if swimming and playing in the surf, with big waves and a powerful undertow.
- Teach children not to dive into surf or a body of water without knowing its depth – always walk in first.
- Be careful around rocks because of the danger of being marooned by the incoming tide or being swept away by a big wave.
- Encourage children to wear sandals or thongs to avoid cuts and injuries from glass, rocks, or syringes. The sand can also be burning hot for young feet on days when the sun is shining.
- Provide protection from the sun with hats, sunscreens and swimsuits or loose fitting clothes that cover the body.
- Teach children to leave sea creatures alone because of the risk of stings or bites.

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## In the bush

Wear sensible clothes when walking to avoid snakebite and to protect against sudden changes in weather. Sturdy shoes, comfortable pants, a hat and a raincoat are necessary items in the bush. Close fitting clothing is also safer around campfires and the barbecue. Remember that campfires left to burn out overnight often contain enough heat the following morning to cause severe burns to bare feet.

- Carry sufficient water and stop frequently for rest breaks and snacks. Remember young children have limited capacity for long walks, especially if the terrain is hilly and challenging. A rough guide for maximum walking distances for children is one kilometre for every year of their age.
- Take care swimming in rivers or waterholes – check the depth of the water and look out for submerged branches and other hidden obstacles.
- Make sure you have sufficient sun protection – hats, sunscreen and appropriate clothes. Sunburn can occur even in the dappled and filtered light of the bush.
- Stick to established trails and keep clear of cliffs.
- Tell a family member or friend where you are going and when you expect to return.

## New toys and equipment

Holidays are a peak time for injuries resulting from falls from bikes and skateboards or injuries from new toys.

Make sure children learn how to use new equipment – bikes, skateboards, in-line skates, trampolines and playground equipment – and supervise them until they are confident and capable; even then it is a good idea to set limits.

Insist that children wear appropriate safety equipment – helmets, reflective gear and light coloured clothing when cycling; helmets, wrist guards, knee and elbow pads with skates and cricket helmets – and include these in the gift for the child.

Choose playground equipment that meets the Australian Standards.

Preschool children should avoid trampolines because of the risk of injury. It is recommended that trampolines are set into the ground and the edges of the trampoline are padded to avoid serious injury.

Teach children to ride bikes, skateboards and in-line skates in quiet, off road locations where there is no traffic before venturing onto bike paths or roads and avoid roads where there is heavy traffic. Child cyclists should not ride unaccompanied until they are ten years of age.

Avoid toys that shoot off projectiles – these can cause serious injuries to the eye and other parts of the body.

Choose sturdy toys that will last – some toys break easily even with normal use and result in sharp edges that can cause lacerations, or small parts that can be swallowed or inhaled and cause choking.

Choose toys that are appropriate for the age and the developmental stage of the child – take note of the age recommendations on the box – and toys that are non-toxic (young children put things in their mouths) and non-flammable.



## Before you travel

1. Check weather forecasts for fire danger days
2. Check for fire restrictions and Total Fire Bans
3. Review your plans – identify the safest route
4. Tell someone where you are going and when
5. Take a portable AM/FM radio and mobile phone

## While you are away

1. Check current fire activity on ABC radio 774 or local radio for the latest emergency information.
2. Be prepared to change your plans on hot, dry and windy days. Do not expect an official warning, Stay alert for smoke or flames in the area, do not let your actions result in a bushfire, extinguish cigarettes and campfires completely.
3. If you see or smell smoke, assume the smoke and heat can affect you.

For further information  
about the Safety Centre  
Telephone 9345 5085  
[www.rch.org.au/safetycentre](http://www.rch.org.au/safetycentre)

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