

# Child safety on farms

Farms can be wonderful places for children, where independence and responsibility are fostered and family relationships are strengthened.

The farm environment provides children with valuable and unique experiences that enable them to develop both socially and physically, even though they are in an isolated setting.

However farms are also workplaces and evidence shows that this places children at greater risk of injury when playing or helping out around the farm.

## What are the facts about children being injured on farms?

On average, 30 children aged under 14 die on Australian farms each year as a result of injury, a third of these being visitors to the farm. Around 600 children are admitted to hospital each year for farm related injuries – that's more than 10 admissions for farm injuries each week. Many more children with farm related injuries present at emergency departments of country hospitals and to general practitioners.

## What are the main causes of injury to children on farms?

For children aged 0–4 years the most common cause of death is drowning, specifically dams, rivers, creeks, pools, water troughs, irrigation channels and animal dips; followed by farm vehicles and machinery, especially tractors (eg. falls and runovers).

For children aged 5–14 years the key causes of death are farm machinery, farm motorcycles (including ATVs), other vehicles and animals (mostly horses).

Farm motorcycles and horses are prominent

causes of non-fatal hospital admissions/emergency department presentation. Other causes of non-fatal farm injury include machinery, vehicles, other animals and farm structures.

## Why are children particularly at risk of farm injury?

Children are at risk for two main reasons. These are to do with the nature of the farm environment and child growth and development characteristics

### **1 The farm – family home and rural workplace**

Farms are often a home and a workplace-children are commonly exposed to workplace hazards not present in urban homes.

Farm hazards are many and varied, with potential consequences of injury being severe or fatal (e.g. drowning, runovers, entanglement, falls).

The severe consequences of injury and the higher frequency and duration of exposure to safety hazards place children on farms at increased risk.

### **2 The child – growing and changing**

Consider the fact that children grow and progress through stages of:

- Physical development
- Intellectual development
- Emotional development.

Children are not only smaller, they see the world differently to adults and are not always rational, cautious or able to foresee unsafe consequences.

Children will learn and develop farm safety skills as they grow and gain experience under supervision. However, full responsibility for personal safety should not rest completely with children, even if they appear competent in some situations or have been given rules to

follow. The safety of children is always an adult responsibility – primarily the parent or carer, but also a shared concern of farm owners, managers, farm workers and other adults visiting the farm.

## What we can do to keep kids safe on farms or rural properties?

It may be helpful to use the **S-A-F-E** approach to address child safety on the farm.

The **S-A-F-E** approach to farm hazards:

- S** See the hazards – conduct a farm safety walk to identify hazards.
- A** Assess the risk of injury and consider how old children are, how long and how often they are exposed to risks.
- F** Fix the problems by using a variety of control measures.
- E** Evaluate and record your actions.

Some people will have more control over implementing safety measures than others, but everyone can help in some way.

## Key messages for adults on farms

- Create a safe play area, such as a securely fenced house yard, which separates small children from bodies of water, farm machinery, vehicles and other hazards. Support this with supervision.
- Ensure someone is designated to ‘keep watch’ over children and that everyone on the farm is alert to ‘watch out’ for children.
- Fill in unused water-bodies (e.g. ditches) and cover tanks with lids.
- Ensure children wear helmets when riding and only ride horses and bikes suited to their size, age and ability.
- Develop and regularly reinforce ‘out of bounds’ areas for children when not with adults (e.g. dams, workshops).
- Apply ‘no passenger’ rules for tractors, machinery and four-wheel motorbikes.
- Ensure children wear seatbelts in vehicles and that they do not ride in the back of utes.
- Provide hearing protection for children accompanying adults using firearms, chainsaws or other noisy equipment.
- Learn how to resuscitate a child.

- Complete the checklist to determine how well you are managing these child safety risks on your farm.

## Checklist for a safe play area

- Is there a safe play area (e.g. a fenced house yard) for small children which is securely separated from farm machinery, vehicles, work activities and other hazards?
- Does the safe play area have shade and interesting things for children to do?
- Are there ‘out-of-bounds’ rules, for children who are not with a supervising adult, which are regularly reinforced?
- Do ‘out-of-bounds’ areas include all hazardous places (e.g. water tanks, farm machinery, vehicles, silos, workshops and areas where stock are yarded)?

## Water

- Are swimming pools, effluent ponds, channels or dams securely fenced if near the house?
- Are tanks, wells and troughs near the house fitted with lids or strong mesh, and are unused ditches filled in?
- Have those who look after children been alerted to ‘keep watch’ when children are around and could wander off into water?
- Do you know how to resuscitate a drowning child?



## Farm motorcycles

- Are children appropriately supervised when learning to ride two-wheeled motorcycles?

- Do all riders always wear a currently fitted motorcycle helmet, long pants, and sturdy footwear when riding motorbikes?
- Does the farm adopt manufacturers' recommendations and:
  - Prevent children under 16 from riding quadrunners (ATVs);
  - Prevent passengers riding on quadrunners.

## Horses

- Are children only allowed to ride horses suited to their age and riding ability?
- Are children appropriately instructed and supervised when learning to ride horses?
- Do children on the farm always wear well-fitted riding helmets and smooth-soled riding boots when riding horses?



## Tractors and machinery

- Do you prevent children from riding as passengers on tractors and machinery?
- Are children encouraged to keep away from tractors and farm machinery on your farm?

## Farm vehicles

- Do children always use seatbelts and proper restraints and never ride in the back of utes?
- Are drivers careful when moving vehicles near the house in case children are present?
- Are keys kept out of reach of children when vehicles are not in use?

## Other hazards

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

Copies of this checklist can be downloaded from Farmsafe Australia

**W** [www.farmsafe.org.au](http://www.farmsafe.org.au)

Please note that the checklist is not a substitute for a comprehensive 'on farm' safety inspection and occupational health and safety management program. More information on this and 'Managing Farm Safety' courses for farm owners and managers is available from Farmsafe Australia and your state Farm Safety Organisation.

The Victorian Farmsafe Alliance is a collaborative project funded by the Victorian WorkCover Authority, the Department of Human Services, The Department of Primary Industries and the Victorian Farmers Federation.

The Victorian Farmsafe Alliance with the support of local farm safety action groups and community centres conducts activities to raise the awareness of farm injuries and presents practical solutions.

## Resources for teachers

There are a variety of resources available to schools and community organizations. The farm model is very popular amongst younger students, as are the activities and puzzles, which support this activity.

A number of videos are available to organisations that wish to run programs about farm safety. Titles include:

- *Health & Safety on the Farm*, a guide to health and safety induction of farm workers.
- *Farm Safety, The Video*, a 10-minute video with a lighter approach depicting hazards faced by children on the farm
- *The John Deere Collection*, a one-hour collection featuring a number of aspects of farm safety.
- *Farm Safety, How One Victorian Farmer Made it Happen*, a practical demonstration of simple solutions to farm hazards.
- *We're Killing our Kids*, a NZ video featuring a doctor pointing out the unacceptable level

- of death and injuries from ATVs on farms.
- *Cattle Handling*, a NZ video demonstrating practical cattle handling skills and yard design.
  - *Clearing the Air*, a guide to handling conflicts in the workplace.

A recently acquired set of display material is also available for loan; this comprises a freestanding display board with a range of posters and information sheets.

A teaching resource called *Ripper – Rural Injury Prevention Primary Education Resource* is available. This provides a teaching program for students of varying ages, and will help reduce children's risk of injury by:

- Increasing their awareness and understanding of farm hazards.
- Helping them develop strategies and behaviours which will prevent farm injuries.

*Safe Play Areas* is a resource package to help parents in rural environments plan and

construct a safe and interesting play area that makes the supervision of children at play more manageable.

The above-mentioned resources are available from Community Health Centres and the Farmsafe Alliance, which is located in the Victorian Farmers Federation office. While many resources are available free on loan, it is advisable to book well in advance. The *Ripper* book sells for \$15.

**For further information contact  
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