Bringing Baby Home

Safety information for new and expectant parents

The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre, Melbourne 2008
The Royal Children's Hospital – Safety Centre

Since 1979 the Safety Centre's mission has been to reduce injury mortality and morbidity by supporting communities to improve health, safety and wellbeing. The Centre's objective is to continue to be a leader in the provision of quality child safety promotion services that meet the needs of all.

Since 1999 the Safety Centre has been accredited by the World Health Organisation (WHO) Collaborating Centre on Community Safety Promotion as an Affiliate Safe Community Support Centre.

The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre aims to reduce unintentional injury through community consultation, education programs and services and collaborative health promotion initiatives. The website www.rch.org.au/safetycentre has an extensive range of resources and links to useful safety information. The telephone advice line (03 9345 5085) provides safety advice for parents and health professionals.

A wide range of safety products are installed or displayed in the Family Resource Centre. Visitors can complete a “Self Guided Tour of Safety Products”. Please call first to arrange this on (03) 9345 4662.

Families with a special needs child or those wanting individual advice on home safety are welcome to make an appointment with a safety consultant in the Safety Centre.

ExxonMobil’s Partnership with The Royal Children’s Hospital Safety Centre

The ExxonMobil Australia group of companies actively supports community projects in areas in which it operates and has been a corporate partner with The Royal Children’s Hospital Safety Centre since 1992.

ExxonMobil congratulates The Royal Children’s Hospital Safety Centre on developing the Brining Baby Home kit that aims to promote safety information for new parents. Babies and young children account for 54% of hospital treated injuries, so understanding safety risks and promoting strategies to reduce injuries is an important priority for the Safety Centre.

ExxonMobil and the Safety Centre have worked together to produce a range of free community education resources and safety fact sheets which are available at www.rch.org.au/safetycentre.

Further information about ExxonMobil Australia is available at: www.exxonmobil.com.au

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The Royal Children’s Hospital Safety Centre, Melbourne 2009
Emergency numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance, Fire, Police (24 hours)</td>
<td>000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Protection Crisis Line (24 hours)</td>
<td>131 278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Line (24 hour drug and alcohol counseling and referral)</td>
<td>Freecall 1800 888 236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids Help Line (24 hour telephone and online counseling for 5 to 18 year olds)</td>
<td>Freecall 1800 55 1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifeline (24 hour telephone counseling and referral)</td>
<td>131 114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Line (24 hour helpline)</td>
<td>132 289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisons Information Line (24 hours)</td>
<td>131 126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Help Line (24 hour helpline)</td>
<td>1300 651 251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse on Call</td>
<td>1300 60 60 24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Safety and child development
birth to 6 months

**Birth to 6 months**
- Rolls over
- Reaches for objects
- Grasps and puts objects in mouth
- Puts everything in mouth (4–8 months)
- Bears weight on legs with support (3–7 months).

**Safety equipment**
Buy car restraints and nursery furniture that meet Australian Standards.
Choose a firm mattress for cot.
Change the baby on a large towel on the floor. Ensure items are within reach and always keep one hand on the baby while on a change table.

**Water safety**
Remain within arms reach with children around water.

**Scald prevention**
Hot water delivered to the bathroom at a maximum of 50ºC to prevent serious scalds.
Don’t consume hot drinks when nursing a baby.

**Fire safety**
Have emergency numbers by the phone.
Install smoke alarms. Test smoke alarms every week. Clean alarms every month. Change the battery every year.
Guards for heaters and fires should be attached to the wall.

**Choking and suffocation**
Choose age appropriate toys without small parts.
Remove all strings and cords from clothing and toys.
6 – 12 months

- Sits up, crawls
- Pulls up to standing position
- First steps holding on
- Waves goodbye
- Walks alone 10–15 months
- Drinks from cup 10–15 months.

**Water safety**
Always empty the bath and empty and remove wading pools immediately after each use to avoid drowning.

Install a pool fence that complies with the Australian standards.

Nappy buckets should have a firm fitting lid and be kept off the floor.

**Car safety**
Adjust the car restraint every time you use it.
Get children out of the car on the kerb side.
Separate the driveway from the play area.

**Preventing falls**
Always use a five-point harness for high chairs, prams, strollers and supermarket trolleys.

Provide a safe play space at home. Use safety glass film, where safety glass is not fitted. Cushion sharp corners on furniture.

Use barriers for stairs to prevent falls.
Use barriers to separate young children from bathrooms and kitchens.

**Poisoning prevention**
Lock away all poisons, medicines, matches and lighters.

**Burns and scalds prevention**
Use cordless kettles. Keep hot drinks, kettles and saucepans out of reach.

Choose low fire danger nightwear.
Choose close fitting nightwear.

**Choking and suffocation**
Children should always be encouraged to sit quietly when eating.
Children under 3 years can choke on any object that can fit into a film canister.
Check toys regularly for loose objects.

**Safety with pets**
Always supervise children around dogs. Obedience training is essential for all dogs.

**Home safety**
Fit power point covers to avoid electrocution.
Bedtime for babies and children is often welcomed by parents as a time to relax, or at least a time to catch up! By setting up the nursery or bedroom with safety in mind, you will sleep soundly in the knowledge that your child is also peaceful, safe and secure. There are many aspects to safe sleeping to consider, for example nursery furniture to buy, setting up the nursery, heating the room during the colder months, whether to use a portable cot when travelling, or bunk beds as children grow older.

Choosing nursery/bedroom furniture

General guidelines

Given the wide range of nursery furniture from which to choose, it can sometimes be overwhelming when trying to decide what to buy. Look for simple designs that incorporate safety features. There are Australian Standards that apply to the design and manufacture of most items. Always ask if the furniture meets these standards. The best choice is not always the most expensive.

Second hand furniture

Occasionally well meaning friends and relatives will offer furniture that they once used with their children – without any injury occurring. The furniture may be in good condition, however safety standards have improved over the years. While you may not wish to offend, it is essential to check the furniture before using.

In general, the furniture needs to be solid and stable, have brakes or locking devices and stability of the cot before short-term use. Check the locking devices and stability of the cot before use, especially second hand furniture.

Cots and mattresses

There is a mandatory Australian Standard that applies to household cots. Use a tape measure to check:

- The space between bars (50–95 mm)
- The distance between the base and top of the cot (at least 600mm)
- The space between the mattress and the sides and ends of the cot should be no more than 20mm.

The mattress should be firm. There are major risks with using ill-fitting and second hand mattresses in cots and portacots, as children can become trapped and suffocate. Pillows, doonas, cot bumpers and cot restraints should not be used.

Portable cots are only meant for short-term use. Check the locking devices and stability of the cot before use, especially second hand furniture.

Never make any alterations to cots.

Prams and strollers

Falls from prams and strollers are common.

Never leave a baby or child unattended or out of sight in a pram or stroller. These items should not replace a cot for sleeping.

In considering whether to buy a pram or stroller think about aspects such as weight, portability and ease of use. Check for the following safety features:

- A five point harness (combined crotch strap, waist belt and shoulder harness)
- A stable and solid frame
- Easy to use and secure brakes.
- A secure frame locks if the pram/stroller folds up for the purpose of carrying
- No gaps that can trap a child’s head, fingers, arms or legs.

High chairs

Wriggling, restless and climbing children often fall out of high chairs. A five-point harness (combined crotch strap, waist belt and shoulder harness) must be used at all times.

Supervision is important and the high chair needs to be positioned well away from benches and stoves. Look for the following safety features:

- A stable frame
- Secure locks, including locks on wheels or castors.

Change tables

Some parents choose to change the baby on the floor. If you prefer a change table look for one that:

- Has a roll-off protection such as a child safety harness and raised sides and ends at least 100mm high
- Has no gaps or spaces at the top of the table
- Is stable and has secure locks.
- Is at a suitable working height for you.

Remember keep one hand on the child at all times.

Safe Sleeping Recommendations

Babies and young children spend a lot of time sleeping. Some sleeping arrangements are not safe. They can increase the risk of SIDS or cause serious sleeping accidents.

1. Sleep baby on back from birth, not on the tummy or side
2. Sleep baby with face uncovered (no doonas, pillows, lambs wool, bumpers or soft toys)
3. Avoid exposing infants to tobacco smoke before and after birth
4. Provide a safe sleeping environment (safe cot, firm, well fitted mattress, safe bedding)
5. Sleep baby in its own safe sleeping environment next to the parent’s bed for the first six to twelve months of life.

Download Safesleep Checklist: www.sidsandkids.org/vic or call 1300 308 307.

Warning: Remember – avoid buying, borrowing or accepting any second-hand products that lack mandatory labels and safety features. Using these products increases the risk to your child of serious injury and possibly death. Source: ‘Safe Products for your Baby’ Consumer Affairs.
Setting up the nursery
Most deaths that have occurred have been associated with cots. In addition to choosing a safe design:

- Position the cot well away from blind cords that can cause strangulation. Curtain rods (wands) are safer than blind cords. Alternatively, cut or tie a knot in blind cords so that they are well out of reach, at least 1600mm above the floor.
- Never tie toys that have string or elastic, or balloons, to a cot. Ties, cords or strings can get caught around the neck and cause strangulation.
- Do not overheat the room. Adequate nightwear and blankets will ensure that your baby is warm.

Moving from cot to bed
When a child starts to climb out of the cot, it may be time to start shopping for a bed. In the meantime it is best to leave the cot sides down so that the child can easily get out, rather than climb and possibly fall out.

Choose a low to the floor bed. A spare mattress placed on the floor beside the bed to break a fall is a good idea until the child gets used to sleeping in the bed.

Bunk beds are not recommended for children under nine years of age. This is due to the number of serious injuries involving bunk beds and young children.

For information about reducing the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) and safe sleeping practices contact the SIDS organisation in your state.

Bunk beds
Select a bunk bed that complies with the mandatory safety standard based on the Australian and New Zealand standard for bunk beds AS/NZS4220. Bunk beds supplied on or after 1st November 2002 must comply with the essential safety requirements of this standard. There may be a label or swing tag confirming compliance. If you are unsure, always check with the supplier.

Bunk beds are not suitable for children under the age of six. Children are at risk of injury in a bunk bed up until they are nine years old. Many injuries occur when children fall from the top bunk while playing.

Do not let children use bunk beds as a play area. Establish rules and ensure they are obeyed.

Keep bunk beds away from ceiling fans. There should be at least two metres clearance between the bunk bed and ceiling fans or lights.

Either allow a clear space greater than 230mm between the bedroom walls and the sides and ends of the bunk, or no space at all.

For further information contact:
Consumer Affairs Victoria Telephone: 1300 558 181
www.consumer.vic.gov.au
Other recommended brochures include:
Keeping Baby Safe-a guide to Nursery Furniture Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
http://www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/655340 Info Centre on 1300 302 502
Car passenger safety

- Motor vehicle accidents are the single biggest killer of children under 15 years of age
- One in 15 people killed in Australia in 2005 in a motor-vehicle-related death was a child under the age of 16.

Why use child restraints?
- Each year in Victoria, hundreds of children are killed or injured needlessly because they are either unrestrained or not restrained correctly
- Most car crashes happen within 10 km of home
- About 70% of young children injured on the roads each year are passengers (VicRoads)
- Children need to be restrained even when travelling a short distance or at a low speed
- The impact suffered by an unrestrained child in a car crash at 60 km/h is the same as falling from a fourth floor window onto concrete.

The law

Is the driver responsible for the passengers being properly restrained in a car?

By law, drivers are responsible for the safety of all passengers up to the age of 16. The penalties are indexed on the spot fine of more than $170 and three demerit points for every child not properly restrained.

The law states that children up to 12 months must be carried in an approved restraint. The restraint must carry an Australian Standards AS 1754 sticker; be suitable for the child’s size and weight; be properly fitted to the vehicle and adjusted to fit the child’s body. As children of the same age can differ in weight and size, age is only a rough guide as to what is the correct restraint to use.

Children aged 1–16 years must be restrained in either an approved, properly fitted and adjusted child restraint suitable for the child’s size and weight or seat belt that is properly adjusted and fastened.

General passenger safety tips:
- Always wear your own seatbelt — they will copy what you do and expect to be restrained. Praise and reward good behaviour
- Make sure that your child’s restraint is properly fitted and comfortable before you start any trip, no matter how short
- Be firm about restraint wearing, even if your child resists. Your child’s safety is your responsibility
- Make sure there are no loose objects on the parcel shelf or in the cargo area of a station wagon or hatchback. Loose items in the car can fly about in a car crash and injure passengers. Keep items stowed away in the car boot, glove box or behind a cargo barrier in station wagons
- It is illegal to leave children (or pets) in a car unattended, even for a short time. The temperature in the car can reach dangerously high temperatures in a short period of time
- Pets should also be restrained.

Choosing a car restraint: which is the best restraint to buy?

Choice of restraint depends on the size and weight of the child, size of vehicle, the space available and costs involved. Parents have the choice of buying or hiring single purpose infant restraints such as a baby safety capsule and then a toddler car seat or they can buy a convertible type car restraint.

Whatever restraint you use, follow the manufacturer’s instructions. If you don’t have fitting instructions or the instructions are hard to follow, ring the manufacturer or go to a restraint fitting station for advice. The following are the types of restraints for children of various weights and sizes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of restraint</th>
<th>Weight limits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rearward-facing baby restraints</td>
<td>Up to 9 kg (or up to 12 kg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward-facing child seat</td>
<td>8 kg to 18 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination seat (forward facing child seat and booster in one)</td>
<td>8 kg to 26 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booster seat</td>
<td>14 kg to 26 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child harness</td>
<td>14 kg to 32 kg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When can children legally sit in the front seat?
Children can legally sit in the front seat at any age provided they are using the restraint that is right for the child’s size and weight. A child is much safer in the back seat, so fill the back seat positions first with the smaller children. The back seat offers 35–40% more protection for passengers.

Can I use child restraints if there are airbags fitted?
It is illegal to use a rearward-facing restraint in a position where it will be hit by an exploding airbag. Check the manufacturer’s instructions and the vehicle owner’s manual about positioning the restraint.

Children in forward facing seats are best in the back seat. If there is no alternative and a child must sit in the front passenger seat, slide or push the seat back as far as possible while still ensuring the seat belt fits correctly.

Choosing a car restraint: which is the best restraint to buy?
The time to move a baby from the rearward to forward facing position is when the baby:

- Has reached the weight limit (length is not so important)
- Is able to sit up independently
- Has sufficient neck strength to hold their head up for the duration of the journey (usually about six months of age)

Remember that weight and height are the most important factors. Rearward facing is the safest way to travel, so keep your baby in this position until he or she reaches the restraint’s maximum weight.

The time to move from a child car restraint to a booster seat is when:

- The child has reached either the weight or height limit
- The harness is stretched to its limit and is tight on the child’s shoulders even when adjusted to the highest position
- The child’s eye level is at the same level as the top of the car restraint, i.e. the child’s head is above the top of the seat and the neck is no longer supported.

NOTE: It is illegal to use a booster seat with a lap belt only. If only a lap belt is being used, a child H-harness MUST be used to hold the child’s head and shoulders back.

When can a child use an adult seat belt?

An adult seat belt is more appropriate for a child who weighs over 26kg and who has outgrown the booster seat. A good alternative however, is to continue to use a H-harness until the child is 32kg.

The adult seat belt (lap/sash belt) must fit correctly on the child’s body to prevent injury. The sash must be over the shoulder, well away from the child’s neck. The lap belt must fit across the hips, not higher up on the body. A device called a SafeFit guide may help to position the adult seat belt correctly on the child.

Children who have a physical impairment, medical condition or special needs may have to have a car seat modified by a professional or use a purpose built car restraint. Drivers of these children need to carry a current medical certificate stating that use of a standard restraint is impractical.

What should I do with my restraint if it has been in a crash?

Restraints are designed to protect children in a single car crash. If the vehicle is involved in a serious crash, then the restraint should be destroyed and replaced by another. A serious crash is one where the vehicle is so badly damaged it is ‘written off’ by the insurer or where someone is injured so severely they have to be taken to hospital.

Should I buy a second hand restraint?

Yes, you can, but find out about its history. Check the back or underside of the restraint for the AS1754 sticker and the date of manufacture. Restraints have a life of about ten years if well looked after.

Don’t use a restraint that is older than 15 years. Check straps for fraying, buckles for smooth operation and the shell of a car seat or capsule for cracks and stress marks.

Can I hire restraints?

There are a number of companies that hire infant and child restraints and booster seats. Some municipal councils also operate a hire scheme for infant restraints.

How do I restrain my child in a taxi?

Taxis are required by law to provide seat belts and anchor points to enable people to fit their own restraint if they have one. Children under one year do not, by law, have to use a child restraint in a taxi if there is not one available, but they must travel in the back of the taxi. If it is possible, take your own restraint with you. If not, travel in the back of the taxi and cocoon your baby on the floor of the car. It is not safe to put a child in a seat belt with you. In a crash your body could crush the child.

Children aged one year and over must be restrained in a taxi by a seatbelt or child restraint if available. A child H-harness is a good way to restrain children over one in a taxi.

Is it safe for children to share seat belts?

No, seat belts are designed for one person only. In a crash, children could easily come out of the seat belts or be injured by each other.

Is it safe if I wear a seat belt and I hold my child on my lap?

No. In the event of a crash, the forces involved mean that the child’s weight increases so much that he/she would be impossible to hold and would be thrown forward. If child restraints or seat belts are available for a child they must be used.

For further information on restraints contact:

RACV (03) 9790 2863
Vic Roads Road Safety Information Service 1300 360 745
www.vicroads.vic.gov.au

The Royal Children’s Hospital Safety Centre, Melbourne 2009
The following list is a general guide only. Every home is different, so some issues will not apply.

By law every home must have at least one working smoke alarm installed on each level of the house. Clean and check your alarms regularly and make sure they are working. Do not deadlock yourself inside the house. Keep keys in the back of the lock or close by.

Please contact the Safety Centre on (03) 9345 5085 for advice on action plans and safety products.

**Kitchen**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oven bolted to the wall and floor to prevent it tipping over</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back burners used on the stove and pot handles always turned away from the front of the stove to avoid scalds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never leave cooking, heaters, open fires or candles unattended</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power point covers fitted to avoid electrocution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire blanket and/or fire extinguisher available in case of fire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not overload power boards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical appliances unplugged after use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep electrical appliances in good working order. Have repairs done by a registered electrician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a fire extinguisher and fire blanket in the kitchen and know how to use them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a fire escape plan and practise it. Have an agreed-upon meeting place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot drinks should always be out of reach of children to prevent scalds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store all matches and lighters out of reach of children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot water in kettles kept out of reach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placemats used instead of tablecloths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highchair is stable and fitted with a five point harness to prevent serious fall injuries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety gate at the entry to the kitchen while cooking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishwasher closed at all times to prevent poisoning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All cleaning products kept in a locked cupboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic bags kept out of reach of children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appliances located within close range of each other, i.e. between sink, stove, fridge and workbenches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microwave positioned out of children’s reach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Bathroom and laundry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All medications and cleaning products stored in locked cupboards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All poisonous substances kept in their original containers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical appliances removed from the bathroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nappy bucket has a firm fitting lid and placed off the floor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-slip surface on bath or non-slip bath mat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power point covers installed to avoid electrocution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children supervised in the bathroom at all times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot water delivered to the bathroom at a maximum 50°C to prevent serious scalds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bath taps inaccessible to young children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean lint filters on clothes dryers regularly and always let dryers complete the cool-down cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Living areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corner covers on sharp edges of furniture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All blind cords out of reach to avoid strangulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire and heater guards securely attached</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matches and lighters kept out of reach of children at all times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heater at least one metre away from curtains or other flammable materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toys stored within children’s reach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe and separate play space provided</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning labels on toys checked before buying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toys in good condition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture kept away from windows</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety glass or shatter-resistant film fitted to low-level windows or glass doors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power point covers fitted to avoid electrocution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety barriers on steps and stairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout and placement of furniture in each room allows a clear pathway to avoid tripping and collisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power boards used instead of double adaptors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bedroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cots are Australian Standards approved for safer design to avoid serious injury</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cot mattress fits snugly to avoid entrapment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mobiles, bumpers or pillows in cot to avoid suffocation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cot away from windows and blinds to avoid strangulation from cords</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change table fitted with body harness, or baby changed on the floor to prevent serious fall injuries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No electric blankets on children’s beds to avoid fire and electrocution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Low Fire Danger’ children’s nightwear worn to reduce fire risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not dry clothing too close to heaters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure cigarette ash and butts are extinguished. Never smoke in bed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke alarms fitted outside each bedroom with batteries checked regularly and replaced annually. It is advisable that smoke alarms should also be installed in bedrooms where people sleep with their door closed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only children over the age of 9 years permitted on the top of an Australian Standards approved bunk bed to avoid serious fall injuries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued on next page
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Garage and sheds</strong></th>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locks on garage and shed doors to prevent access</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisonous substances kept in original containers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paints, flammable liquids and poisonous substances in locked cupboards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All power tools stored in locked cupboard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small objects (e.g. nails, screws etc.) stored up high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children not permitted to play around machinery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Outdoors</strong></th>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pram or stroller fitted with a five point harness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wading pool always emptied immediately after use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children constantly supervised near water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe fenced area provided for children to play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fence checked regularly and in good condition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children encouraged to play in shade, wear hats and protective clothing to avoid sunburn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small amounts of SPF30+ sunscreen used on hands, feet and face</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play equipment checked regularly and in good condition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft surface under playground equipment maintained at a depth of 300mm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children always supervised near dogs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden checked for poisonous plants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No tree branches at child’s eye level to avoid injury</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Balconies</strong></th>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balcony entry points are kept locked to avoid balconies being used as a play area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are supervised on balconies at all times</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose heavy furniture, rather than light plastic furniture, and ensure it is positioned away from railings to avoid children moving furniture and using it to climb on railings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height of railing at least 1000mm (1 metre), but if balcony is higher than 3 metres off the ground, railing to be at least 1200mm high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railing is vertical so children cannot climb railing like a ladder, with gaps between railing no wider than 100mm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balcony surface is non-slip to prevent falls, and all tripping hazards removed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>On the road</strong></th>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First aid kit and fire extinguisher checked and kept in car</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children always travel in the back seat in an Australian Standards approved child restraint</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child restraints properly fitted and used at all times</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child safety locks on car doors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children always get in and out of the car on the kerb side</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gate to the road kept closed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driveway separated from play areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddler’s hand always held when near a road</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic lights or pedestrian crossings used when available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children taught to ‘Stop, Look, Listen and Think’ before crossing roads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helmets always worn when riding bicycles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrist guards, knee and elbow pads, closed-toe shoes and helmets worn when riding skateboards, scooters and in-line skates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First aid kits
We recommend that all parents and carers are trained in first aid and update their qualifications in cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) each year. First aid kits are essential in the home, in the car and when on holidays. Keep a list of contents in the kit to check and restock regularly.

Ideas for contents to include in a first aid kit
The contents of the first aid kit will vary depending on a number of issues. Consider the following:
- The extent of your first aid training and qualifications
- Your confidence and experience in using the contents
- The individual needs of your family
- How far away you may be from emergency services
- The type of activities all family members will be participating in.

Suggested first aid kit contents
The following are suggested items to include in a first aid kit. You can buy a first aid kit or compile your own. For further advice refer to a first aid book or your first aid training provider. Your local doctor or pharmacist should advise on items such as anti-irritant creams, analgesics and antiseptics. Medicines and creams should be stored separately in a medicine cabinet with a child resistant lock.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First aid reference book and emergency phone numbers/CPR chart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pencil and note pad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposable protective gloves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resuscitation pocket mask or face shield</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small hand towels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individually wrapped sterile adhesive dressings (assorted widths)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individually wrapped sterile non-adhesive dressings (100mm x 100mm)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterile cotton gauze swabs (75mm x 75mm)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypoallergenic adhesive strips and tape (25mm x 2.5 metre roll)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small, medium and large size wound dressings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 stretch bandages (50, 75 and 100mm x 1.5 metres)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangular calico bandages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety pins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rust resistant scissors with one blunt tip (approx. 100mm in length)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rust resistant tweezers with a protective guard to prevent tip damage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic bags (150mm x 200mm) resealable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterile combine dressing (90mm x 200mm)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterile normal saline solution – single use (100ml container) for eyewash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thermometer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant cold compress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot/cold reusable compress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterfly wound closures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposable splinter probes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician’s diagnostic pen light / torch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency blanket</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packet of tissues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposable drinking cup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic kidney dish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye pads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic kitchen film or clean cotton pillowcase to cover burns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre-schoolers are often injured at home. This is because they may spend the greater part of their day at home, are curious, adventurous and do not fully understand the consequences of their actions. Very few houses are purpose-built for children; they have features and objects that pose risks for them.

There are many simple ways to reduce this risk, for example by:

- Removing potentially dangerous items
- Adding safety products
- Moving objects, such as furniture, and changing the layout of a room
- Changing the way you go about your daily routine.

**Prevention is best**

The choices you make will depend upon your individual situation and the age of your child or children. Most importantly, take steps now to provide a safe play space. Make sure you also maintain a constant vigil over your adventurous, inexperienced child. In many situations adult supervision will reduce the risk of injury.

If parents or carers incorporated safety features at the design, construction or renovation stage when building a new home or renovating a home the potential for injury reduction would be high and long lasting. By modifying the environment, injury risk can be reduced without relying on human behaviour, at a stage which may be most cost effective.

Common scenarios leading to injury:

- Collisions because of poorly designed kitchens
- Injuries to children in play areas because of poor visual contact between work areas (kitchen, laundry) and play areas (yard, family room)
- Collisions and impacts because of poorly positioned doorway openings
- Falls due to poor lighting, floor surface, tripping hazards, visitors or other distractions
- Lack of supervision of children during phone calls.

**Rates of home injury**

The frequency of hospital-treated home injury is relative to the age of the child, i.e. the younger the child, the higher the frequency of injury. Children aged 0 – 4 years account for 54% of hospital-treated home injuries, compared to 27% for 5 – 9 year olds and 20% for 10 – 14 year olds.

**Main causes of injury**

Common causes of injuries to young children in the home include poisoning, burns, finger jams, dog bites, falls and near drowning.

**Suggested ways to increase safety inside the home**

**Kitchen**

The majority of child injuries associated with the kitchen are in the 0 – 4 age group. Injuries include poisoning, falls or from hot beverages or hot water. Try to keep children out of the kitchen when you are cooking. Place a safety gate (a half door), in the doorway. Some parents may choose to use a playpen at this busy time.
Poisoning is the fourth highest cause of child hospitalisation in Victoria. All household cleaning and other poisonous products should be kept out of reach and out of sight of young children. Lock poisons away including the cleaning products under the kitchen sink.

Consider installing an oven guard, or a stove guard that fits around the hot plates.

Use tablemats rather than a tablecloth on the table to stop young children from reaching up and pulling down items.

The dishwasher, fridge door, drawers and cupboards should be fitted with child resistant locks or latches (there are different types for different uses).

Include a fire blanket, extinguisher and a smoke detector near the entry to the kitchen.

Tie knots in plastic bags and store out of reach of children to avoid suffocation.

Safety taps or tap covers may be necessary if the tap water is too hot.

Bathroom

In proportion to the amount of time in use, the bathroom is the most dangerous room in the home for children. Under 5 year olds were involved in 70% of bathroom child injuries. Almost two thirds of admitted cases related to either scalds or near drowning. Fall injury is also common in the bathroom due to the combination of water and potentially slippery surfaces.

The skin of infants and young children burns more deeply and more quickly and at lower temperatures than that of most adults. (Wilson, 1991). In addition, the relative surface area affected in a child is much greater than for an adult for a similar exposure. At 60°C it takes one second for hot water to cause a full thickness burn in a child, which will need surgery and skin grafting. At 50°C it takes 5 minutes for hot water to cause a full thickness burn (Moritz, Henriques, 1947). Other than children, high-risk groups for tap water scalds are older people, who also have sensitive skin, and people with disabilities.

All new hot water installations must deliver hot water not exceeding 50°C in residential buildings at the outlets in all bathrooms and ensuites.

Options to reduce the risk of scalds include:

- Turning down the thermostat on hot water services (gas)
- Installing a tempering valve to the bathroom pipes (recommended for electric hot water services)
- Installing a mixing valve
- Installing anti-scald devices in taps, child resistant taps, tap covers or single lever mixing taps, which prevent hot water being turned on to the full.

Other ways to improve bathroom safety include:

- Keep the door shut or place a safety gate (a half door) in the doorway
- Install a poisons cabinet and fit child resistant locks to cupboards and drawers
- Use anti-slip mats on the floor, bath and shower. Contact a flooring company who specialises in anti-slip materials
- Protect electrical outlets with power point covers
- Lock away hair dryers and electrical shavers
- Do not use a floor heater
- Always check the temperature of the water before placing your baby or child in the bath; use your elbow or a thermometer (a comfortable temperature for a baby is between 37–39°C)
- Ensure hot water taps are turned off tightly, particularly before putting children in the bath.

Always remain within arms reach of your baby or child in the bath.

Laundry

Keep the door closed or use a safety gate (half door) in the doorway.

Choose a nappy bucket with a firm fitting lid and keep it off the floor to avoid drowning; for example, place it in the laundry trough or on top of the washing machine.

Fit cupboards with child resistant locks for safe storage of washing powder and cleaners.

For further information:
For further safety features throughout the home please refer to The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre Home Safety Checklist.
Water safety

Water is an essential part of all our lives – to bath, drink, cook and play. Young children are often drawn to water. Unfortunately and all too often, natural curiosity results in drowning or near drowning. Whether it is at the beach, in the backyard, the bathroom, or on a farm, children need to be protected from water.

It only takes a few centimetres of water for a child to drown, within a few minutes.

Learning to swim is to be encouraged, however it is important to be realistic about what babies and young children can hope to achieve, particularly in unfamiliar situations or in the event of falling unexpectedly into water. Swimming lessons for young children provide an opportunity for them to gain confidence (‘water familiarisation’) or simply to have fun. Lessons do not ‘drown proof’ children. There are many reasons to believe that children over the age of three years are better able to learn to swim, however it takes years for a child to reach a consistent standard. Children must be within an adult’s constant visual eye contact at all times when near water.

Rates of injury
Most children who drown are under 5 years of age. One and 2 year olds are most at risk.

Main causes of injury
Private swimming pools/spas and baths account for most drowning or near drowning incidents (50%–65%).

Most drownings happen when a child falls or wanders into a pool or spa. When drowning has happened in fenced pools, the pools were found to have faulty gates or gates that were propped open. Children also use items such as outdoor furniture to enable them to climb over a pool fence.

Other places where children have drowned include baths, dams, creeks, wading pools, the beach, and even buckets.

Suggested ways to reduce the risk of injury
Children must always be within an adult’s constant visual eye contact at all times when near water. Older children should not be responsible for younger children.

Start swimming lessons when a child is about 3 or 4 years of age.

Ensure that home ponds are covered by wire mesh.

First aid skills
Parents should ensure they have current training in resuscitation techniques, learning basic first aid and resuscitation skills (CPR or cardiopulmonary resuscitation).

Plan to do a CPR refresher course once a year, as first aid practices sometimes change and there is a tendency to forget when the skills are not used regularly. In the event of a child falling unexpectedly into water, quick rescue and resuscitation (if needed) will make a difference to the outcome.

It is a good idea to have a resuscitation chart by the phone or on the pool fence.

In an emergency dial 000, or use the memory dialling facility on your phone.
Pools and spas

Ensure all backyard pools and spas are fenced in accordance with AS1926.

Find out about pool fencing requirements from your local council.

A fence that entirely surrounds the pool is best, including a self-closing and latching gate.

The gate must be kept in good working order. Never prop open gates or doors leading to pools and spas.

Take floating toys out of the pool after use, as they can be a temptation to young children.

Ensure that there are no objects, ladders, garden furniture or other climbing equipment near the pool or spa, which children can climb on to gain access to the pool. Make sure toddlers can’t get under your pool fence.

Empty a paddling pool immediately after use.

At the beach

Swim between the flags at lifesaver patrolled beaches.

School aged children will benefit from information and education classes that some life saving clubs offer, e.g. beach safety, and what to do in a rip or strong current. Contact your local branch of The Royal Life Saving Society of Australia, or Surf Life Saving Victoria.

Bathrooms and laundries

A child under 5 years of age must always be within arm’s reach of an adult when in the bath, not under the supervision of an older child.

Bath seats are not a substitute for adult supervision.

When bathing a child, leave the telephone answering machine on, or if you must answer the phone, take the child with you. A cordless phone with you in the bathroom may be a better alternative.

Choose a nappy bucket that has a firm-fitting lid and keep it off the floor. Nappy buckets should not be left within reach of a toddler.

Keep the door to the bathroom, laundry and toilet closed at all times.

On the farm

Children on farms should be provided with a fenced and safe play area. Children need to be separated from dams, lakes and creeks, as well as sump holes, irrigation channels and troughs.

For further information:

- Life Saving Victoria. Telephone: (03) 9676 6900  
  www.lifesavingvictoria.com.au
- Play it safe by the water, Department of Justice, Victoria.  
  www.watersafety.vic.gov.au

Statistics are based on those provided by the Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit, Monash University. Figures have been rounded off for ease of reading.
Preventing falls

Falls are the most common single cause of hospital-treated injury in all age groups. From the time your child starts to roll, crawl and climb there is the ever-present risk of falls.

Slips and falls can be a normal part of growing up, for example when a child is learning to walk. Many falls are not serious and may simply result in a bump or bruise; others may result in fractures, cuts or head injuries. There are many actions you can take to prevent the more serious injuries.

There are three important factors which influence the seriousness of a fall:

1. The height the child can fall from: The lower the height the lower the danger. Children under 5 should not have access to heights over 1.5 metres. Older children should not have access to heights over 2 metres.

2. What the child falls onto: Hard surfaces such as concrete, ceramic tiles, even compacted sand are more hazardous to fall onto than softer surfaces. Impact absorbing or soft fall materials under play equipment are recommended to provide a softer landing. A depth of 300mm is required and this needs to be maintained.

3. What the child may hit as they fall: Place sharp edged furniture such as coffee tables to the side where a child is unlikely to fall onto them. Glass may cause serious injury, therefore consider using safety glass or shatter resistant film. Make glass doors visible with stickers at a child’s eye level. Place furniture so that children cannot run into windows or fall from furniture into glass. Low-level glass should be replaced with safety glass whenever glass is replaced in existing homes.

Rate of fall injuries

At least 42% of hospital treated falls that happen to children aged 0 – 14 years occur in the home and a fifth (20%) in educational settings.

Boys experience a higher hospitalisation rate as a result of falls than girls in all age groups.

Main causes of falls

Fall injury is common in the bathroom due to the combination of water and potentially slippery surfaces.

For children under 5 years of age most falls occur:

- From nursery furniture including baby walkers
- Onto furniture and down stairs
- On the same level (as compared to falls on steps and stairs).

In the older age group (5–14 years of age) most falls occur:

- From playground equipment
- From bunk beds and other furniture
- In sports-related activities such as using trampolines, in-line skates, roller skates, skateboards and bicycles.
Prevention of falls

Preventing falls with babies

Place babies where they cannot fall. Babies wriggle from birth and it is not long before they learn to roll over. Babies may unexpectedly fall from a bed or change table. Always keep one hand on your baby when using a change table. Whenever feasible use the floor when changing a baby.

An active baby may move a bouncinette causing it to fall from a table or bench top. Do not place bouncinettes above floor level. When babies have learnt to roll they can easily move across an area into danger.

Never carry your baby around in bouncinettes or rocker chairs. Never place these products on tables or raised surfaces when your baby is using them.

Preventing falls with toddlers

A standing and toddling baby has frequent minor falls. To minimise these, look at the environment from their level.

Create a clear area, removing tripping hazards such as rugs and electrical cords. Pad sharp corners of benches and tables, or remove them from the play area.

Use a full body (five point) harness in high chairs, strollers and shopping trolleys.

Do not use baby walkers. They give a young child the mobility to place them in danger quickly and unexpectedly.

Be aware that falls are more common when a child is tired or unwell. Plan quiet activities for these occasions.

Use a safety gate at the top and bottom of stairs.

Use a sensor light for stairs and steps.

Preventing falls with children

Once a child has learnt to walk they quickly manage to climb and usually enjoy this activity. The pre-school child has the physical ability to reach heights but has no fear or understanding of the consequences of a fall.

Lock windows in multi-storey buildings so that children cannot climb out, or ensure that they have restricted openings of less than 100mm.

Scissors, knives or glasses are some of the sharp objects which may cause serious injury if a child falls. Discourage children from walking or running with these objects, especially in their mouths.

Suggested ways to protect your child from falls

Furniture

Children can sustain serious harm including head injuries after falling from nursery furniture.

If your child is continually trying to climb out of the cot leave the sides down. When your child is ready to move from a cot to a bed, place a mattress on the floor to soften a fall.

Bunk beds are not recommended for children under 9 years of age. Do not let children play on bunk beds and ensure top bunk beds have a guardrail.

Place sharp edged furniture such as coffee and bedside tables where a child is unlikely to fall on to them.

Remove from the cot any toys that your baby can use to climb on and fall out.

Ensure moving products such as prams have workable braking devices and locks.

Slippery areas

Where slippery surfaces are walked on use a:

- Nightlight in passageways and bathrooms/toilets
- Slip resistant bath/shower surfaces
- Slip resistant floor surfaces.

When wet, some surfaces become extremely slippery for all age groups. A kitchen floor with water on it becomes a crash scene for a toddler. Therefore, wiping up spills quickly is important.

Encourage children to sit when drinking to reduce spills.

Bathroom floors are often hard, wet surfaces. Use rubber mats to help reduce slipping. There are anti-slip flooring products commercially available to assist in indoor and outdoor areas. Products such as safety walk tape, rubberised paint, slip resistant concrete spray and lock matting are examples of products available.

Playground equipment and outside

The older child may have an understanding of danger but may still take risks. Playgrounds are for the purpose of fun. They can be designed for adventure and safety. Good design, placement and maintenance of play equipment will reduce the likelihood of severe injury, whether this is at home, at school or in a public playground. Carefully placed playground equipment will discourage children from walking in front of a swing or falling from one piece and hitting another.

Playgrounds can be made safer by the choice of equipment of an appropriate height, the provision of safety rails, the size of the bars and the layout of the equipment.

Good under surfacing for play equipment kept at a depth of 300mm is of utmost importance.

Children should use playground equipment in a fenced backyard or a park that is suitable for their size and age. Trampolines are not recommended for children under 6 years of age.

For children under 5 years, it is safer to use play equipment that is less than 1.5 metres in height and for older children, less than 2 metres.

An Australian Standards approved bicycle helmet must be used by children when riding a bike. It is also advisable for a young child to wear a helmet when using a tricycle in the backyard and for older children when using in-line skates, roller skates, skateboards and scooters.

For further information:
Consumer Affairs Victoria
Telephone: 1300 558 181
www.consumer.vic.gov.au

References:
Safe Products for your baby.
Consumer Affairs Victoria.
Young children have been known to eat and swallow foul-tasting and also dangerous substances. Although many poisonings occur in children, death is rare. Emergency treatment and admission to hospital of children due to swallowing or inhaling a poison unfortunately occurs all too often.

Most young children who are accidentally poisoned at home come from loving families with attentive, caring parents or guardians. However, it’s simply not possible to watch your children every minute of the day.

Parents are often surprised to learn that they have so many poisonous substances at home and also the speed at which their child can get hold of them.

**Rates of poisoning**

In Victoria, at least eight children a day receive medical attention after swallowing poison.

Poisoning occurs predominantly in children under five years of age and is most common in those between one and three years of age.

Poisoning is the second leading cause of injury hospitalisation, after accidental falls, in children 0–4 years of age in Victoria. Still most parents don’t believe it will happen to their children or in their home.

The most serious poisoning usually involves medicines. Medications are responsible for more than 70% of childhood poisonings.

Eighty four percent of unintentional poisonings occur in the home because of improper storage.

Statistics are based on those provided by the Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit (VISU) 2005.

**Most common causes of poisoning in children under 5 years of age (calls to VPIC 2005)**

**Drugs and medications:**
- Paracetamol
- Antibiotics
- Cough and cold medicines e.g. Demazin, Dimetapp.

**Household chemicals:**
- Pesticides, rat or mice baits
- Cleaning agents – general purpose or hard surface cleaners
- Soaps, sink detergents
- Dishwasher powders or tablets
- Bleaches.

There are many more poisons you need to be aware of, including vaporiser solutions, asthma medication, benzodiazepines (drugs prescribed as muscle relaxants or anticonvulsants), antihistamines, cosmetics, essential oils, contraceptives, tobacco, alcohol, iron tablets, migraine tablets, mothballs, petrol, oven cleaners and drain cleaners.
Suggested ways to reduce the risk of poisoning

You can reduce the risk of poisoning by the safe storage and safe use of medications and poisonous substances.

Medications

Store medicines immediately after they have been bought. Keep them out of reach and out of sight of your child, in a cabinet or cupboard with a child-resistant lock, at least 1.5 metres above the ground.

While medicines and other products are in use never leave them in reach of a child, not even for a minute or two.

Do not confuse your child by referring to medicines as ‘lollies’; they may sometimes look the same in shape, size and colour. Resist the temptation to use medicine dispensers, such as measuring cups, as toys.

Check the correct medication and dosage with your doctor or pharmacist and carefully read the label. More than the recommended dose may be harmful.

Dispose of unwanted and out-of-date medicines and chemicals safely by returning them to the pharmacy.

Refrigerators are not a safe storage location. When it is necessary to store medicines in the fridge, store in a small locked medicine box.

Children tend to imitate adults, so avoid taking medicines in their presence.

Avoid giving non-prescription medications routinely without consulting a doctor or pharmacist.

Handbags are not a safe storage location. Visitor’s bags may contain medicines. Always keep them out of reach.

Household products

Consider alternative cleaning products, for example a mixture of vinegar and bicarbonate of soda will effectively clean most surfaces.

Store dangerous products in a high cupboard with a child resistant lock.

Leave chemicals in their original containers, do not use drink bottles.

Store food separately from cleaning products and chemicals.

Choose containers with child resistant closures.

Lock garden sheds and garages.

Dishwashing machines

Buy dishwashing powder or liquid in child resistant containers. They are corrosive and can severely burn if swallowed.

Put detergent in the machine last and close the door immediately. Keep children away while adding detergent to the machine.

When emptying the machine, check for leftover powder or liquid.

Choose a dishwasher with a child resistant lock or purchase an adhesive lock to prevent access by toddlers.

Plants

Remove all poisonous plants from your garden.

If you are unsure of the correct names of the plants you have in your garden, take a small piece to your local nursery for identification.

For a list of poisonous plants visit the VPIC website at www.austin.org.au/poisons

Poisons information

For immediate and correct first aid advice, call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 (24 hours, Australia wide).

The Royal Children’s Hospital Safety Centre,
Flemington Road, Parkville Vic 3052
Telephone 9345 5085
Website: www.rch.org.au/safetycentre
Choking and suffocation are major risks for babies and toddlers for a number of reasons. From only a few months of age, infants put objects in their mouths – this is one of the ways they learn about things. Young children are naturally curious and will always be exploring their environment – they will look and touch, tug and experiment. Young children’s airways are small and easily blocked, their reflexes are not well developed and their bodies are not strong, so they are less likely to be able to get themselves out of trouble.

There are a number of areas in and around the house that present a choking and suffocation risk to infants and young children.

**Food**

Certain foods can be dangerous for young children because they can easily be inhaled and block off the breathing tubes. These include nuts, raw carrots and other hard vegetables, pieces of apple, popcorn, corn chips, lollies and grapes. Remember that young children under the age of three years may not be able to chew properly because they do not yet have their full complement of teeth, so anything that is firm is a potential hazard.

Points to remember:

- Never give nuts to children under five years of age
- Carrots and other hard fruit and vegetables should be cooked, mashed or grated
- At eating times stay with young children and make sure they sit quietly while eating or drinking
- Meat should be cooked and cut into small pieces
- Never force young children to eat, as this may cause them to choke
- Nurse your baby while he/she drinks from a bottle
- A baby should not be left alone with a bottle

**Toys**

Any object that is small enough to fit into a film canister can choke a child less than three years of age.

Avoid selecting toys that have small parts as it is likely that at some stage they will find their way into the mouth of a young child where it can easily be inhaled and cause choking. Remember also that some less sturdy toys can break easily into small bits that can be dangerous. Choose age-appropriate toys that are sturdy and well made.

When outdoors make sure that young children do not have unsupervised access to rope swings as these can present a strangulation hazard.

**Curtain and blind cords**

Young children can get caught in dangling curtain cords, as well as in ropes and straps and cords attached to dummies. Fit blinds and curtains with rods instead of cords.

Where there are cords, wrap them around a cleat (available from hardware stores) attached to the wall near the top of the curtain or blind. The length of any cord should not be longer than 30cm and be well off the floor and out of reach of curious toddlers.

Other important points:

- Do not attach cords or string to dummies
- Keep cots away from blind and curtain cords
- Keep mobiles out of reach of infants.
Plastics
Plastic bags, dry cleaning bags and plastic wrap are especially dangerous for young children. A child can easily suffocate if they pull them over their heads.

- Always tie a knot in dry cleaning and plastic bags before throwing them out
- Plastic bags should be stored out of reach
- Plastic covers on mattresses should always be removed and discarded before use – these are not a substitute for waterproof mattress protectors
- Do not give uninflated balloons to young children (long strings on balloons are also dangerous).

Pillows and mattresses
These are another potential hazard for suffocation in young children.

- Pillows and cot bumper pads should not be used for children under two years of age
- Choose a firm, close fitting mattress and avoid putting infants and young children to sleep on soft surfaces such as beanbags and waterbeds
- Infants should not be put to sleep on sofas or in adult beds.

Prams
Do not use the pram as a ‘sleeping container’ for periods when the infant is unsupervised.

Clothing
- When choosing clothing avoid ties, ribbons or crocheted jackets that may pull tight
- Always remove a baby’s bib before putting them down to sleep
- Avoid necklaces and other jewellery that can get caught
- Be aware of cords and drawstrings on clothing such as parkas and hooded windcheaters as they can catch on play equipment.

Small articles
Anything that fits into a film canister is a choking hazard for young children under three years of age. Make sure that young children cannot reach or play with:

- Needles, pins and safety pins
- Coins and small disc batteries
- Buttons, beads, marbles, the tops of ballpoint pens and polystyrene beads which are found in stuffed toys and bean bags and easily inhaled
- Watermelon seeds, dried peas, toys with small parts that can be removed or disassembled.

Disused refrigerators and toy boxes
The law requires fridge doors be removed before disposal in a tip (or on the nature strip outside the house waiting for collection). Make sure that this is done at home too if the fridge is no longer in use. Children love playing hiding games and storage boxes are a favourite place. Make sure that a heavy lid or one that catches cannot trap the child inside – it would be safer to remove the lid.

First aid for choking and suffocation
Anyone caring for young children should take a course in children’s first aid. The Safety Centre facilitates courses, as do St. John Ambulance Association, Australian Red Cross Society, the Royal Life Saving Society and the National Heart Foundation. Local branches of these organisations can be found in the telephone directory.

A first aid manual should always be kept close by, along with a first aid kit. Books and kits are available from the shops at The Royal Children’s Hospital.
The kitchen is a common site for many children’s injuries occurring inside the house. Paying attention to a number of areas in the kitchen can help prevent injuries.

### Kitchen design and organisation:
- Consider a safety gate at the entrance to the kitchen to prevent access when cooking.
- Make sure corners at a child’s height are rounded or padded.
- Use child resistant locks on cupboards, especially those containing detergents and dishwasher tablets, powder or liquid, cleaning products or other poisons.
- Never put poisons in food or drink containers. Poisons should be kept in their original containers and clearly labelled.
- Position all electrical outlets close to the bench surface where the appliances will be used.
- Make sure that drawers or cupboards with knives, scissors, matches and lighters have child resistant locks fitted.
- Building regulations state that every home in Victoria must have a smoke alarm complying with Australian Standard AS 3786. It is recommend that the smoke alarms be placed outside bedrooms, and not in the kitchen. Smoke alarms to be checked weekly and batteries to be replaced annually.
- Install smoke alarms near the entrance to the kitchen. Check regularly and replace batteries annually.
- Design the stove and the sink to be close to each other – this minimises carrying of hot food and possible scalds. Have benches on either side of the stove to avoid the need to carry hot food and liquids.
- Items that are used frequently should be stored in easy reach and at a convenient height, preferably between shoulder and hip height.

### Electrical safety:
- Switch off and unplug appliances after use.
- Replace any damaged plugs or frayed electrical cords.
- Avoid extension cords and double adaptors – a safety power board is better.
- Fit plastic power point protectors to electrical outlets when not in use.
- Keep appliances away from the sink area and do not use appliances or power points with wet hands.
- Ask an electrician to install safety switches. These can cut power off quickly to avoid accidental electrocution.
Microwave safety:
• Make sure the microwave is out of reach of children
• Food and liquids heated in the microwave can reach scalding temperatures very quickly. The heat is often uneven so it is important to shake or stir the contents before serving
• Always check the temperature of the food or liquid before serving
• Avoid glass bottles and containers as they may crack or even explode when heated in the microwave
• Warm up a baby’s bottle without the teat or cap. If the bottle feels warm to touch, then the contents are probably too hot for baby
• Test the temperature of the milk by pouring a few drops on the inside of the wrist; it should feel just warm on the skin
• When food is heated or cooked in a covered container, steam that can scald is trapped inside. Remove the lid or plastic covering from the far side of the container so steam rises away from you.

Preventing burns and scalds
Avoid long dangling cords on electric kettles and other appliances; use short or curly cords or a cordless jug.

Hotplates
Use the back burners or hot plates whenever possible.

Pots and saucepans
Turn handles away from the edge of the stove.

Stove
Use a stove guard to protect young children from scalds.

Hot drinks
Keep hot drinks away from children and never have a child on your lap while you have a hot drink.

Table
Put all hot liquids and food in the centre of the table and away from the edges.

Tablecloths
Children can pull the edge of the tablecloth and pull hot fluids over themselves. Use non-slip place mats instead.

Playpen
When busy in the kitchen, use a playpen or safety gate to avoid the child getting underfoot.

Hot water
Turn down the temperature of the hot water delivered in bathrooms to 50 degrees to avoid scalding.

Preventing falls and cuts:
• Make sure that children are not able to open drawers or cupboards where knives, scissors or other sharp objects are kept
• Ensure that floors have a non-slip surface
• Wipe up spills immediately
• Avoid changes in floor level
• Use sturdy household steps for high and hard to reach cupboards or storage – never stand on a chair
• Keep children’s toys out of the kitchen – they are easy to trip over
• Throw away chipped and cracked glasses and crockery.
Many burn injuries, especially scald and flame burns, can result in permanent scarring, disfigurement and disability. The more serious injuries result in long and repeated periods of hospitalisation, many skin graft operations and on-going psychological trauma.

The majority of burn injuries to young children are caused by scalds from hot liquids. For information on scald prevention, see the Safety Centre’s fact sheets on Kitchen Safety and Home Safety.

Young children can be fascinated by flames and fire, and do not realise the possible dangers. It is therefore important to protect them by making their home and environment as safe as possible.

**Rates of flame burn injury**

One in every six burn injuries to children aged 0 – 14 is a flame burn. There has been a 17% decrease in the number of children aged 0 – 4 admitted to hospital with flame burn injuries in recent years. This reduction is due to a number of factors, including fire-warning labels on children’s nightwear, the banning of firecrackers, the use of safety guards on heaters, the use of central heating and education of parents, carers and children.

In a house fire, more people are injured by smoke than by flames.

**Causes of flame injury in children**

House fires can be started simply by children playing with matches. Children should never have access to matches and lighters.

The majority of all house fires start in the kitchen, for example oil or fat fires. Other injuries are caused by clothing fires, electrical burns and contact burns from heaters or oven doors.

Older children are most likely to receive burns as a result of misusing flammable liquids and aerosol cans.
Home fire safety

Fire safety equipment:
- The earlier a fire is detected, the greater the chance of escaping safely. Working smoke alarms are essential to protect life and property. Install smoke alarms in your house or unit. If people, especially children, sleep with the bedroom door closed, install an extra alarm inside the bedroom.
- Change smoke alarms batteries every year when daylight savings ends and test them regularly (ie weekly)
- Install a fixed guard around an open fire, and most heaters. A good test of whether the heater needs a guard is to carefully attempt to place your hand on the surface of the heater. If the surface is so hot that you cannot leave your hand there for ten seconds, the heater needs a guard to prevent contact burns to young children.
- Install a guard around the hot plates on the stove.
- Install a safety switch to prevent electrocution.
- Use power boards; they are safer than double adapters.
- Keep a fire blanket and a dry powder extinguisher in the kitchen and know how to use them. Fire blankets must be at least one metre from the stove and your fire extinguisher is best located near the kitchen entrance.

Fire safety behaviours:
- Use the back burners on the stove first and ensure pot handles point towards the back.
- Never use water to put out a fat or oil fire.
- Do not leave cooking, heaters, open fires and candles unattended.
- Regularly check the connection on the barbecue for any gas leaks.
- Fabrics and loose clothing can catch fire easily. Keep your clothing away from heat. Tie long hair back to prevent accidents. Choose close-fitting nightwear for children with the label ‘styled to reduce fire danger’ or ‘low fire danger’.
- Lock matches, cigarette lighters and flammable liquids away. Lighters with child-resistant locks are available but they still need to be locked away.
- Clean the lint filter on clothes dryers every time you use them and let dryers go through a ‘cool down’ cycle.
- Fires caused by damaged and frayed cords can be prevented. Keep electrical appliances and cords in good repair by having them regularly checked. It is recommended that all repairs to electrical appliances be done by a qualified electrical tradesperson.
- Small fan heaters are not recommended with children in the home.

In the case of a house fire:
- Have a fire exit plan and practice it with the family. Make sure there are two ways out of the house. It is also important to have two means of exit from each room.
- All children should know how to “stop, drop, cover and roll” if their clothing catches on fire. Reinforce this with your child when you are practising a fire drill.
- In a house fire remember to crawl low in smoke to the nearest exit, to avoid smoke and poisonous gases.
- You may have to get out of your home quickly, so keep your keys in the locks if possible, or on a hook in the centre of the door.
- Do not lock deadlocks on doors at night. Install deadlocks that you can open from the inside without a key.
- In the event of fire, the emergency number to call is 000, from the nearest available phone. Be prepared to give name, address, and nearest crossroads.
- Make sure your house number is clearly visible from the street, should a fire truck ever be needed.

For further information:
- If your child is lighting or playing with fire contact the Juvenile Fire Awareness and Intervention Program (JFAIP). Telephone: 1300 309 988 Email: jfaip@mfb.vic.gov.au.
- The Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) have many programs to help keep you, your family, your home, and your workplace safe from fire. These include programs for children, retired groups and multicultural groups. The CFA and MFB also provide training and advice for safety in the workplace.
- Contact: Community Education at MFB:
  Telephone: (03) 9665 4464
  or www.mfb.org.au
- Community Education at CFA:
  Telephone: (03) 9262 8444
  or www.cfa.vic.gov.au

References:
- Statistics are based on those provided by the Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit (Hazard 57), Autumn 2004, Monash University.
- MFB Home Fire Safety Brochure 2-05/05.
Growing up with a pet can be a wonderful experience for children. A pet will provide hours of fun and entertainment as well as an opportunity for children to learn to love, respect and care for other creatures. Alongside the joys of pet ownership also come the responsibilities, for example grooming, exercising and feeding. School aged children are better able to learn these skills and will delight in taking care of their special friend. Younger children and pets will need closer supervision to ensure both their safety.

By far the majority of family pets are dogs and cats. Some other pets include rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, fish, birds, reptiles and horses. Whether the animal is big or small has fur, gills or scales, the best way for children to learn how to properly care for it is by following the right example. Children do not always appreciate that animals do not follow ‘human rules’ of behaviour, therefore the more you understand animal behaviours and habits, the better you can model the correct ways to care for your pet. The time spent in getting to know your pet will ensure that you have many enjoyable and rewarding years together.

**Choosing a new pet**

If you are considering buying a pet then it is worthwhile seeking some information first. Spend a little time at your local library researching animals; speak to a vet, an animal breeder, or other pet owners before deciding what to buy. If you prefer a dog or cat, the Petcare Information and Advisory Service (telephone: 1800 631 784, internet: www.petnet.com.au) can assist you to choose a suitable breed for your family situation and lifestyle.

**When you already have a pet in the household**

A new baby in the household can sometimes be threatening for a pet such as a dog or cat that has been the centre of attention for years. Once a curious child starts to crawl, your pet may need protection – from squeezing, poking and thrown objects! There are some simple rules to follow, particularly relating to dogs, because dogs have the potential to cause serious injury if innocently provoked:

- Before your baby arrives, start to get your dog used to unexpected and gentle pulls of the ears, tail or paws. Make this playful and reward your dog.
- Prior to bringing your baby home from the hospital, have your dog get used to its unfamiliar scent. Allow your dog to occasionally sniff something that the baby has been wrapped in, such as a rug or clothing.
- When the dog and baby are in the same room, praise and reward your dog so that it starts to relate good things with the baby. Ignoring the dog, even without realising you are doing so because of changes in routine, can create a negative association between dog and baby.
Main causes of injury
Most children who are injured as a result of dog bites are under the age of five years. Whilst some dog bites occur in public places the majority of children injured by dogs are bitten by their own dog or another familiar dog in someone’s home. It is important to remember that all dogs irrespective of breed can bite.

The main health risk to children associated with other animals include infections due to:
- Bites and scratches from cats and small mammals, e.g. rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters.
- Handling of birds, particularly those from the parrot family.
- Children eating dirt that contains animal faeces.

Although less likely, a cat curled up beside a sleeping baby in a cot could potentially result in the child being smothered. Children have been known to drown in fishponds that have not been secured with wire netting and children who live on farms are at higher risk of injury when not supervised around farm animals. Children, particularly girls ten years and older, are occasionally seriously injured in horse related accidents, either when riding in a horse drawn vehicle or whilst horse riding.

Reduce the risk of dog bites by:
- Always supervising children near dogs.
- Ensuring your dog is properly trained to sit, stay, drop and come.
- Choosing a breed that is suited to your family’s lifestyle and environment.
- Making sure your dog is friendly with children.

Teach your child to:
- Always ask permission from the owner before slowly approaching an unfamiliar dog.
- Avoid approaching dogs that are sleeping or eating.
- Stand still like a fence post if approached by a strange dog and not squeal or jump.
- Avoid eye contact with the dog by looking at their own feet.

For more information about preventing dog bites, refer to the Safety Centre’s Dogs ‘n’ Kids® brochure, booklet and poster.

References and further information:
- The Petcare Information and Advisory Service
  Telephone toll free 1800 631 784
  www.petnet.com.au
- Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit Monash University Accident Research Centre
  www.monash.edu.au/muarc/visu
- Equestrian Federation of Australia
  www.efanational.com
- The Domestic (Feral & Nuisance) Animal Act 81/1994 now provides a permit system for breeds of dogs declared to be restricted.
  www.dse.vic.gov.au
- Dogs & Kids information kit from The Royal Children’s Hospital Safety Centre
  Telephone (03) 9345 5085
  www.rch.org.au/safetycentre
Useful websites on child safety, injury prevention and child development

**The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre**  
Website: [www.rch.org.au/safetycentre](http://www.rch.org.au/safetycentre)  
The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre aims to reduce unintentional injury, through community consultation, education programs and services and collaborative health promotion initiatives.

**The Royal Children's Hospital – Kids Health Info**  
Website: [www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo)  
Kids Health Info is The Royal Children's Hospital website for medical information written for parents (and later for children too). RCH fact sheets represent quality kids health information on a range of topics, and will be continually added to. Fact sheets aim to help you better understand or care for a child with a health problem.

**Better Health Channel**  
The Better Health Channel is a consumer health information website for the Victorian community.  
The site’s aim has always been to provide free health and medical information in an easy to understand format and language.

**Office of the Child Safety Commissioner**  
Website: [www.ocsc.vic.gov.au](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au)  
The Commissioner provides advice to both the Minister for Community Services and the Minister for Children on issues impacting on the lives of children, in particular, vulnerable children.

**Raising Children Network**  
Website: [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)  
Australian Parenting Website.

**Having a Baby in Victoria**  
Victorian Government Health Information.

**Department of Education and Early Childhood Development**  
The service offers support, information and advice regarding partnerships, child safety, immunisation, breastfeeding, nutrition and family planning.

**Kidsafe Victoria**  
Website: [www.kidsafевич.com.au](http://www.kidsafевич.com.au)  
Kidsafe – the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia is a charitable foundation dedicated to the prevention of unintentional death and injury to children.

**Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing**  
This database identifies national, state and territory and local government legislation, standards and codes of practice that are designed to prevent unintentional injuries in children.

**Centre for Community Child Health**  
Website: [www.rch.org.au/ccch](http://www.rch.org.au/ccch)  
Website: [www.rch.org.au/ecconnections](http://www.rch.org.au/ecconnections)  
The Centre is a University of Melbourne academic centre based at The Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne. It is also a key centre of the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute.

**Early Childhood Australia (ECA)**  
Website: [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)  
Early Childhood Australia works with Government, early childhood professionals, parents, other carers of young children, and various lobby groups to secure the best range of options and outcomes for children as they grow and develop.

**Australian Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association (AICAFMHA)**  
Website: [www.aicafmha.net.au](http://www.aicafmha.net.au)  
Promotes mental health for young Australians.
Our thanks to the Office of The Child Safety Commissioner for contributing this section and for it’s ongoing support in keeping children safe.

Telephone: (03) 8601 5884
www.ocsc.vic.gov.au