Should My Child Use A Baby Walker?
Tips and Advice from Kidsafe Victoria and The Royal Children’s Hospital Safety Centre

Baby walkers have been a talking point over many years, with calls from some quarters for these products to be banned both in Australia and overseas. Despite these concerns, baby walkers have remained a popular nursery furniture product amongst parents and carers.

If you are an expectant parent or a parent with a young child, you might be asking yourself, ‘Are baby walkers safe to use?’ or ‘Should I buy one for my child?’ Kidsafe Victoria and The Royal Children’s Hospital Safety Centre have some information and advice to help you make an informed decision.

Baby walkers are generally not recommended for use by safety organisations and health professionals. This is due to a number of reasons, including:

**Injury concerns**
Baby walkers provide children with greater access to a wide range of hazards in the home, placing them at greater risk of injury.

The major injuries associated with baby walker use include:
- Falling onto hard surface, usually down steps or changes in level.
- Burns and scalds as a result of children gaining access to hot beverages and electrical appliances (e.g. kettles, heaters and ovens).
- Choking from toys or play entertainment attachments that come off easily.
- Finger entrapments from collapsing baby walkers, and;
- Poisoning as a result of children gaining access to items such as medications and household cleaners.

Concerns over injuries associated with baby walker use has led to the sale, importation and ownership of them being made illegal in Canada.

**Developmental concerns**
There is a common misconception that baby walkers assist children to learn to walk earlier by helping them to develop their walking skills. Research into the use of baby walkers has in fact shown the opposite, with the products linked to delays in achieving normal locomotor milestones such as crawling, standing alone and walking.

Children need to be able to develop their muscles in order to be able to learn to roll, sit and crawl before they learn to walk. Placing your child on the floor to play is a great way of letting them exercise and naturally develop these skills. It will also help them to develop their balance and coordination, very important skills for when they start to walk.

If you do choose to purchase and use a baby walker, there are some important safety precautions to take, including:
- Making sure that the baby walker complies with the Australian mandatory standard. This is particularly important if you are looking to purchase items online. The baby walker must have a sticker or marking to say that it complies with the mandatory standard.
- Ensuring the baby walker clearly displays the two legally required safety labels (pictured below).
• Ensuring that your baby fits properly in the walker.
• Looking for a walker with an automatic braking mechanism (required by the mandatory standard) to reduce the risk of the baby walker falling down steps. Safety features such as this can help to reduce the risk of injury, however they can't be relied upon on their own to keep children safe.
• Never leaving your child unattended in a baby walker – you should always supervise children and keep them in view while they are in a baby walker.
• Making sure that the baby walker is only used on flat, even and safe surfaces to avoid falls or tipping over.
• Blocking off access to hazards such as stairs, kitchens, radiators, space heaters and fireplaces by using a gate or door barrier.
• Not placing any objects on the baby walker that could cause it to tip over, and;
• Only using baby walkers for a short period of time e.g. 15 minutes maximum, as overuse may delay learning to crawl, stand alone and walk.

For more information, advice and safety tips on baby walkers and a range of other nursery furniture products, please visit the website links below:
http://www.productsafety.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/973743
www.kidsafevic.com.au
http://www.rch.org.au/safetycentre/