



Baby-Proofing Your Home

Babies learn quickly in their first year. For new parents, it's a pleasant surprise to see how soon they begin moving and exploring. But turn your back for a moment, and the infant who was squirming helplessly on a blanket is suddenly crawling across the room at high speeds.

Children are naturally curious. Tasting, touching and feeling are how infants and toddlers learn about the world around them. Take a moment to look at your surroundings from a youngster's point of view. Then make any necessary adjustments to baby proof your home.

Mechanical suffocation and suffocation by ingested objects cause the most home fatalities to children 0-4 years of age. Drownings and home fires also contribute to the death of young children.

Suffocation and Choking

- Infants, when placed on an adult bed of any kind, can roll into the space between the wall and the mattress and suffocate. Exercise caution if sleeping in the same bed with an infant. It is possible for an infant to become wedged between your body and the mattress and suffocate. Infants should never be placed on top of soft surfaces like sofas, large soft toys, sofa cushions, pillows, water beds or on top of blankets, quilts or comforters.
- Babies should sleep on their backs.
- Crib bars should be no more than 2 3/8 inches apart to prevent infants from getting their heads stuck between them. Cribs manufactured after 1974 must meet this and other strict safety standards.
- The crib mattress must fit tightly so there are no gaps for an infant to fall into. Keep the crib clear of plastic sheets, pillows and large stuffed animals or toys. These can be suffocation hazards.
- Keep toys with long strings or cords away from infants and young children. A cord can become wrapped around an infant's neck and cause strangulation. Toys with long strings, cords, loops or ribbons should never be hung in cribs or playpens. Similarly, pacifiers should never be attached to strings or ribbons around the baby's neck.
- Place an infant or child's bed away from any windows. Check window coverings for potentially hazardous pull cords.
- Use child safety gates at the top and bottom of all staircases and be sure they're installed correctly. Avoid accordion style safety gates with large openings that children could fit their heads through.

- Choking is a common cause of unintentional death in children under the age of 1. Avoid all foods that could lodge in a child's throat. Some examples include popcorn, grapes, foods with pits, raisins, nuts, hard candies, raw vegetables, and small pieces of hotdogs.
- Never let children of any age eat or suck on anything, such as hard candy, while lying down.
- Keep floors, tables and cabinet tops free of small objects that could be swallowed. Such objects include coins, button-sized batteries, rings, nails, tacks and broken or deflated balloons.

Falls and Burns

- A mixer faucet on the basin, tub and shower will prevent scalds. Set your hot water thermostat for 120° F. A baby's bathwater should be 100°F. Always check bathwater temperature with your wrist or elbow before putting a baby in to bathe. Don't allow children in a whirlpool, Jacuzzi or hot tub. Their bodies are more sensitive to hot water.
- Teach youngsters that matches are tools for adults, not toys. Adults should never ignite lighters or matches in front of children. Store matches in a fire-resistant container out of the reach of youngsters.
- Do not smoke, use matches or drink hot beverages while holding an infant. Don't leave burning cigarettes unattended.
- Remember that radiators, heating vents, space heaters, fireplaces, stoves and hot water taps are not always hot. Children can touch them once safely and the next time receive a severe burn.
- Keep electrical cords and wires out of the way so toddlers can't pull, trip or chew on them. Cover wall outlets with safety caps.

Drowning

- Never leave a child unsupervised in the bathtub. If you must leave the room for a telephone call or to answer the door, wrap the child in a towel and take him or her with you. Don't leave a small child alone with any container of liquid, including wading pools, scrub buckets, and toilets.
- A swimming pool drowning could also be called a "silent death" as there is rarely a splash or cry for help to alert parents to the problem. The typical drowning victim is a boy between 1 and 3 years old who is thought not to be in the pool area at the time of the incident.
 - Fence in the pool completely. Doors leading to the pool area should be self closing and self-latching or equipped with exit alarms and should never be propped open.

- Never take your eyes off children when they are in or near any body of water, not even for a second. Don't rely on inflatable devices, such as inner tubes, water wings, inflatable mattresses and toys or other similar objects to keep a youngster afloat. Keep toys, tricycles and other playthings away from the pool area. A toddler near the water could unexpectedly fall in.
- All pool owners and their families are encouraged to seek training in swimming, lifesaving, first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

If it seems that there is a lot to do before that new bundle of joy comes home – you are correct. However, simple safety checks can help ensure that you and baby will have many happy and healthy years together.