Safety tips for parents of infants



most common causes of accidental death for Canadian children.

Although you don't want to become paranoid as a parent, you should ensure that all items purchased for your baby meet safety standards. You should also do a safety check in your home before your baby is born. Ensure that all required changes are made and all dangerous items are removed before baby arrives.

General safety

Begin by walking around your house. Check for hazards or unsafe places that a baby could get into. Also consider the following safety precautions, if you haven't already:

- Put locks and safety guards on all windows and balcony doors.
- Put safety gates at both ends of all stairways.
- Ensure all electrical wires and cords are either taped down or placed well clear of a baby's reach.
- Keep kitchen counter edges clear of kettles or other appliances with cords that could be pulled down.
- Put safety covers on all electrical outlets.
- Get a device from your hardware store to tie up all blind and curtain cords.
- Ensure all medications, household cleaners and other potentially toxic substances, including garden pesticides and fertilizers, are kept in locked cupboards or cabinets.
- Turn the water heater down to 120 degrees or less, to avoid accidental scalding.
- Remove all furniture that has sharp or hard edges close to floor level.
- Remove glass furniture or glass ornaments that could break and cut a small child.
- Remove any house plants that could be poisonous.
- Tightly seal trunks, chests or other boxes with heavy lids that could snap shut on a small child.

Safe habits

Once you've arrived home with your new baby, you'll want to begin a new routine involving safe habits, as you go about your day:

- When cooking, always turn pot handles away from the edge of the stove so they can't be pulled down and avoid using tablecloths that can be pulled down, potentially causing items to fall and spill.
- When housecleaning, avoid putting very hot water in buckets for floor cleaning and ensure that all cleaning materials are kept safely out of baby's reach while you clean.
- Don't let candles burn close to fabrics or paper materials, such as curtains, blinds, newspapers or party decorations and keep candles well out of young children's reach and don't leave them burning when you leave the room.

- Ensure that your baby never has access to small items or foods that could cause choking. Examples can include beads, buttons, coins, nuts, small raw vegetable pieces and popcorn and keep all plastic bags safely out of baby's reach.

- Never leave a baby unattended in a high chair, alone in a stroller while you are shopping, or alone in a vehicle—for any reason.

- Never leave a baby or toddler alone for even a moment in a bath, wading pool or close to a swimming pool.

- To reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, put baby to sleep on his or her back on a firm flat surface and keep your baby warm, not hot, when sleeping.

- Create a smoke-free environment before and after birth.

Specific areas of safety

You may think that baby furniture and baby supplies are made with a child's best interest in mind. However, there can always be risk of injury. Consider the following safety precautions regarding your baby items:

Cribs

- Check for a label that says when the crib was made; cribs made after 1986 are most safe to use.
- Check regularly to ensure that the frame is solid and that all screws are tight.
- Make sure the mattress is tight against all four sides of the crib.
- Place the crib well away from windows, curtains, blind cords, lamps, electrical plugs and extension outlets.
- When in the crib, don't let baby wear a necklace or a pacifier on a cord around its neck.

Sleepwear

- Don't let babies or small children wear loose-fitting or baggy sleepwear, or clothes that could easily catch fire.
- If making sleepwear yourself, choose a fabric like polyester, which doesn't burn as quickly as cotton.

Pacifiers/Soothers

- Never tie a pacifier around a child's neck or attach it with a cord.
- Examine pacifiers frequently to ensure that the nipple is firmly attached to the shield.
- Throw the pacifier away as soon as it becomes cracked, torn, discoloured or shows other signs of wear.

Playpens

- Ensure latches or pivoting hinges on top rails of playpens are always in a closed position or completely rotated, so that they won't collapse and trap baby. Do not use the playpen if the latches don't stay closed.

- Never leave one side down on a drop-sided style playpen. A baby could become trapped in the space between the floor pad and the loose side.

Strollers

- Ensure that the stroller you purchase is stable and cannot tip easily.
- Avoid unbalancing the stroller with heavy loads.
- Choose a stroller with a good locking mechanism to prevent accidental folding or collapsing.
- Ensure the stroller is properly equipped with safety straps or harnesses, and be sure to always use them.

Toys

- Avoid all small toys such as marbles, beads or small balls. These can be a serious choking hazard.
- Make sure larger toys do not have loose small parts that could break off.
- Keep balloons away from small children and babies.
- Do not buy toys with sharp edges.
- Make sure all batteries in toys are properly installed.
- When baby begins to push up with hands and knees, remove any toys or mobiles that have been strung across the crib.

With the arrival of a new baby, the planning and excitement may cause you to easily overlook some safety measures in your home. Be sure to consider the precautions outlined in this article to ensure your baby's safety throughout its infancy and beyond.