

# House Call *for* Healthy Kids

## Will Infants and Children Survive in Your Home?

The popularity of the “Survivor” television shows attests to the appeal of challenging a group of people to test their skills against the raw elements of a deserted island, the Australian Outback, or Boot Camp. Millions tune in weekly to see who will survive and who will not.

Ironically, every day, many families everywhere face a “survivor” challenge in their own homes. Babies and children are the most likely to be injured or die.

Take a closer look at your own home. Will your children survive in this setting? Or, are there elements in your home that place your baby or child at risk of injury or death? The perils of a deserted island, the Australian Outback, or Boot Camp pale when compared to the everyday dangers at home.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, American Academy of Pediatrics, and other national safety organizations identify the home environment as the primary setting where most unintentional injuries to infants and children take place. More than 4.5 million children nationwide are injured in the home every year. “Infants and preschool age children spend most of their time at home, which increases their chances for being injured at home,” says Rebecca Agness of Riley Hospital for Children’s Community Education Department.

As infants and children move through developmental phases, their risks for injury change. Newborns wiggle and squirm and may move their bodies in unexpected directions and at unpredictable times and places. Infants roll, grab, push themselves up, and put anything in their mouths. Older babies begin to crawl, grab, pick things up and drop them, and walk by holding on. Toddlers move, climb, open doors and pick up things on the ground. Two-year-old children are in constant motion and may move in a direction without warning. A child’s size, age, and interest in exploring puts them constantly in new situations that they may not be equipped to handle, which is why it is so important that adults take necessary steps to make the home setting as safe as possible.

### What You Can Do:

Increase the chances that the people in your family or “tribe” will all be sitting around the table in your home next year by taking these steps today. First, begin by crawling on the floor of your home and seeing each room from your child’s point of view. What is in reach? (from the floor to about 40 inches above). What dangers are buried in your carpets, under couches, or in corners? Taking the time to safety check your home 1)lowers your child’s chances for injury; 2)increases your ability to provide proper protection for your child; and 3)makes it easier to watch your child at home. Even after taking these steps, there is no 100% guarantee that your home is now completely child safe. Providing supervision for children at all times, especially in places where injury is likely to occur, such as the kitchen or bathroom, is an important part of maintaining a safe home setting for children.

### To prevent fires, burns, and scalds:

Two thirds of the 540 children nationwide who died in 1999 in the home from unintentional fires and burns were ages four and under. Young children will touch hot things or drink hot things without understanding they can be burned or scalded. Children also will play with matches or lighters, including fireplace matches and grill lighters. Here are some steps you can take to prevent fires, burns, and scalds:

- Install smoke alarms on all floors of your home and outside every sleeping area. Inspect smoke alarms monthly to make certain batteries are operating. Replace batteries annually.
- Plan and practice a family fire escape plan regularly. Identify at least 2 ways out of every room and a meeting place where everyone gathers after evacuating from your home. Teach your children not to hide in closets or under beds to escape fires.
- Set the thermostat of your hot water heater no higher than 120 degrees Fahrenheit to reduce the occurrence of scald burns.
- Do not put hot food or beverages on a tablecloth or placemats, which can be easily pulled off from these surfaces and cause burns or scalds.
- Use back burners on the stove. Turn pot handles toward the back of the stove.
- Cover all electrical outlets not in use to reduce unintentional shocks.

### To prevent poisoning:

Young children will eat or drink items that are poisonous, especially when something looks appealing, different, or colorful. Children ages 1-2 are at the greatest risk of dying from ingesting poisons in the home. An estimated 60 children died nationally from home poisonings in 1999. Taking these steps can help prevent poisoning to children in your home:

- Lock up your medicine cabinet. Throw away old medicines.
- Lock up household and yard products.
- Keep your purse out of reach. Set it up on a high counter or table, never on the floor.

- Use products with child-resistant packaging. Recognize that these products, however, are not completely childproof and must still be locked up.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector in your home in every sleeping area and check batteries frequently. While odorless, breathing the fumes of even low levels of poisonous gas can be deadly to a small child.

#### **To prevent fall-related injuries:**

Half of the 70 children who died nationwide due to falls in homes in 1999 were ages four and under. Babies wiggle out of seating devices, roll off of furniture or tumble down stairs.

Fall-related injuries can be prevented with these steps:

- Use a playpen, infant swing, or high chair instead of a baby walker. Use a safety belt to secure a child properly into a high chair or swing.
- Secure a baby properly in any infant carrier or infant car safety seat.
- Install safety gates at the top and bottom of all stairways. Keep stairways free from clutter.
- Make sure window screens are securely in place or that window guards are present to prevent a child from falling out the window. Keep beds, cribs, or other furniture away from windows.
- Install corner and edge bumpers on all furniture and cabinetry.
- Install adequate depths of protective ground cover under and around your child's playground equipment. Provide constant supervision for children on any playground.

#### **To prevent drownings:**

Nearly 80 percent of the 340 children who drowned in and around homes in 1999 across the country were ages four and under. Young children are quick to move and in seconds may disappear from an adult's sight. Some steps you can take to prevent drownings include:

- Install 4-sided isolation fencing at least 5 feet high with self-closing and self-latching gates around pools. Always supervise children when around water.
- Keep toilet seats down and, if possible, install toilet locks. Children are top-heavy, which means when they lean forward, they may lose their balance and could drown in as little as one inch of water.

#### **To prevent choking and suffocation:**

Eighty percent of the 370 children nationwide who suffocated in the home in 1999 were ages four and under. Three quarters of the 180 children who choked to death at homes across the country in 1999 were ages four and under. Babies can suffocate when laying on soft blankets, mattresses, or pillows. Children can choke or suffocate from putting items in their mouths that are too big or round, which block the airway. Take these steps to prevent choking and suffocation:

- Keep plastic bags, latex balloons, small parts, hard candy, and other choking and suffocation hazards out of reach.

- Keep beds and cribs and other furniture away from windows and drapery. Use window blind safety tassels or cordless window coverings to avoid the dangers of a child strangling in drapery cords.
- Beware of old cribs or older baby furniture that may not meet today's safety standards. Sharp edges, small spaces between crib slats, and corner post protrusions can be deadly.

#### **To prevent body injury:**

More than 80 percent of the estimated 60 children nationwide who died from unintentional home shootings in 1999 were ages five to fourteen. Young children especially are curious and able to discover firearms, even when adults believe them to be carefully hidden away.

Children are always exploring, which leads to cuts and puncture wounds when sharp objects are found. Some steps you can take to prevent these injuries are:

- Attach trigger locks to all guns and lock up all guns in your home. Store and lock up ammunition separately.
- Make sure sharp knives or other sharp utensils and appliances are well out of reach.

#### **For emergencies:**

A quick response time to any injury is important. Some steps you can take to assure prompt attention to a child's injury are:

- Post emergency numbers by all household telephones. These numbers should include: poison control center, pediatrician, police department, fire department, emergency medical services, and a neighbor.
- Maintain first aid supplies in your home and in your car. Your first aid kit should include a bottle of syrup of ipecac for each child, which should be used only on the advice of a poison control center or physician.
- Take a first aid class from an accredited organization, such as the American Red Cross or the American Heart Association.

For more information on preventing child injuries in the home, call Rebecca Agness at the Community Education Department of Riley Hospital for Children at 317-274-2964 or visit Safety Smart at [www.rileyforkids.org](http://www.rileyforkids.org).