Falls

Overview
Falls hurt more children ages 14 and under than any other unintentional injury. In fact, one-third of patients treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries sustained in falls are children. Children most often fall from the following:

- baby walkers
- furniture
- playground equipment
- shopping carts
- stairs
- windows

The severity of injuries sustained in a fall depends on the height of the fall and the landing surface. Most serious or fatal falls involve head injuries.

Proper safety measures in the home can help prevent certain types of falls, including those involving baby walkers and stairs. Installing window guards and/or moving furniture away from windows may prevent some falls. In addition, making sure the surface underneath playground equipment is a loose-fill surfacing or special playground surfacing can help minimize injuries in a fall.

Prevention
Constant adult supervision, informed product selection, and modifications to the home can help reduce the likelihood of childhood falls and related injuries. The following are tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Safety Council:

Furniture:
- Never leave babies alone on any furniture - beds, tables, sofas, cribs with the guardrails down, or changing tables - even if they have never rolled over.
- Choose baby products that meet required safety standards. Utilize all safety straps and features. Look for special safety features on high chairs, cribs, and other equipment.
- Install padding on sharp corners.

Windows:
- Install window guards on all windows above the first floor.
- If you must open windows for ventilation, make sure your child cannot reach the open window.
- Set rules with your child about playing near windows.
- Remove furniture near windows that children can climb on.
- Do not rely on insect screens to keep children from falling out of windows.
Stairs:
- Remove clutter from floor and stairs.
- Use safety gates to prevent infants and toddlers from falling down stairs. Do not use accordion gates with large openings, because children can get trapped.

Floor surfaces:
- Modify slippery surfaces and remove hazards on floors wherever possible.
- Secure area rugs with foam carpet backing, double-sided tape, or a rubber pad.

Playgrounds:
- Adults should always supervise children during trips to the playground. Young children, and even older ones, often do not have the proper judgment to identify unsafe situations that proper supervision can help prevent. In case there are injuries, an adult should be on hand to administer first-aid immediately.
- Make sure playground equipment is age-appropriate. Most equipment manufactured today is made for two age groups: children from 2 to 5 years old, and children from 5 to 12 years old. Since 1994, manufacturers are required to have a sticker placed on each piece of equipment indicating the appropriate age group it is designed for. Looking for this sticker can help you judge whether it is age-appropriate for your child.
- Play areas for younger children should be separate from those of older children. To reduce the risk of injury, children under the age of 5 should not play on equipment taller than four feet. Equipment for 5 to 12-year-olds should not be taller than eight feet.
- Surfaces under playground equipment should be soft enough to absorb falls. Recommended surfaces include wood chips or mulch, sand, pea gravel, rubber, and rubber-like materials that are maintained at a depth of 12 inches. Other safe alternatives include rubber mats, synthetic turf, or other artificial materials. Concrete, grass, blacktop, and packed surfaces are considered unsafe.
- Surface materials should cover "fall zones" surrounding equipment. This usually requires a minimum of six feet in all directions from the equipment.
- Playground equipment should be adequately spaced apart from one another to prevent overcrowding.
- Swings, seesaws, and other equipment with moving parts should be located in areas that are separate from the rest of the playground in order to prevent children from having to cross directly in front of or behind swings to reach them.
- Make sure equipment has been specifically designed for playground use.

A warning about baby walkers:
Since baby walkers cause more injuries than any other nursery products, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the National Association for Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions (NACHRI) have called for a ban of baby walkers. Even with close adult supervision, baby walkers are not safe. Alternatives to baby walkers that are safer include the following:
- stationary "walkers," which allow the child to rotate and bounce
- play pens
- high chairs
Consult with your child's physician for more information.
Identifying High-Risk Situations

Certain age groups among children are more prone to certain types of falls. For example, infants are more likely to fall from furniture, while toddlers are more likely to fall from windows. Older children sustain more fall-related injuries from playground equipment.

- **Furniture:**
  Babies, who are left unsupervised on top of beds, changing tables, and even couches, can roll off unexpectedly.

- **Windows:**
  Young children are naturally curious and will explore an open window. Windows that are open just five inches pose a danger to children under the age of 10. Falls from windows tend to be the most severe and/or fatal. In addition, even a closed window can be dangerous if the child can get near it - falling through glass can cause serious and often fatal injuries.

- **Stairs:**
  Infants and toddlers do not realize the danger of falling down stairs. In addition, older children who are running up and down stairs can trip and injure themselves. Clutter on stairs poses an increased risk of falling.

- **Floor surfaces:**
  Area rugs that are not secured, especially on bare floors, can cause a child to fall. Mats that are not slip-resistant and tubs without slip-resistant stickers can increase the risk of falling.

- **Playgrounds:**
  Although playgrounds can provide children with exercise and an enjoyment of the outdoors, they also pose safety hazards. Faulty playground equipment, not using proper equipment for different sporting activities, and careless behavior leads to an estimated 15 child fatalities ages 14 and under each year.

**A warning about baby walkers:**

Baby walker-related injuries kill two children a year. In 2003 alone, an estimated 3,200 children were treated for baby-walker related injuries. Consider these statistics:

- Most children that sustain injuries from baby walkers are between the ages of 5 and 15 months.
- Most baby walker-related injuries are caused by falls down stairs (76 percent) or tipping over (12 percent).

In addition to increasing the risk of falls down stairs, baby walkers give small children access to hot substances on tables and stoves, as well as poisonous substances. Based on these alarming statistics, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the National Association for Children’s Hospitals and Related Institutions (NACHRI) have called for a ban of baby walkers.
**Injury Statistics and Incidence Rates**

The following statistics are from the National SAFE KIDS Campaign:

**Injury and death rates:**
- More than 2.3 million children ages 14 and under are treated annually at hospital emergency rooms for fall-related injuries.
- Recent reports show falls killed about 80 children ages 14 and under in one year.
- More than half of fall-related injuries among children occur among ages five and under.
- About 18 children ages 10 and under die annually from falls from windows. Another 4,700 children ages 14 and under will require treatment each year for window fall-related injuries.

**Where and when:**
- Infants are more likely to fall from furniture, baby walkers, and stairs.
- Toddlers tend to fall from windows.
- Older children fall more often from playground equipment.

**Who:**
- Children ages 10 and under sustain fall-related injuries twice as often as other children.
- Boys are twice as likely to die from fall-related injuries as girls.

**Playgrounds:**
- Each year, nearly 207,000 children, ages 14 and under, require emergency room treatment due to playground falls.
- The most severe playground-related injuries are due to falls (90 percent). One-third of playground-related fatalities are due to falls.
- Children ages four and under tend to suffer injuries to the face and head from playground-related injuries, while older children are more likely to injure arms or hands.

Available online at [www.musckids.com](http://www.musckids.com)

This handout was developed to help individuals understand more about injury prevention measures. It is meant to be used as a guide. Please consult the manufacturer’s instructions and/or your healthcare provider if you have any questions.