



# Safety tips

## for young children



**NSW HEALTH**

Emergencies **000**

Poisons Information Centre **13 11 26**  
24 hour advice on poisoning

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# Safety tips for young children

This section provides advice on creating a safe environment for your child. It is organised into four age groups with specific safety tips for each group:

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Injury has now replaced disease as the biggest single cause of death to Australian children after their first birthday. Evidence has demonstrated that most preventable incidents occur in the home.

# Babies from birth to crawling

## Birth – 9 months

### Baby is learning

Each child develops at their own pace, usually through similar stages and order of development. Your baby will start to wriggle and roll at about 3 months, sit up at about 6 months and crawl at about 9 months. Your child will also start to reach and grasp for objects and put them into their mouth. Understanding your child's development as they grow will help you gain a great deal of satisfaction and enjoyment from your child and help to keep them safe.

### Common safety concerns

#### Tip:

*Any floatation or bathing aid is NOT a substitute for parental supervision - never leave your child alone in or near water*

- baby rolling off the change table, bench or bed.
- choking on a small item found lying around.
- scalding by a hot drink being spilled over the child while being held by a carer.
- accidental ingestion of poison/medication..

### Bathing

- prepare to bath and dress your baby by putting everything you need within your reach. Never leave your child unattended.
- place a non-slip mat in the bottom of the bath to avoid baby slipping.

- check the water temperature with a thermometer or the inside of your wrist before placing your baby in the bath. The temperature should be no more than 38°C to avoid a scald injury.
- always stay with your baby while bathing. Never take your eyes off baby when they are near water.
- don't leave on older sibling to supervise a baby in water.
- ensure the hot water tap cannot be turned on.



## Dressing

- never leave your baby alone on the change table, bench or bed.
- do not dress your baby in clothes with long drawstrings, ribbons or cords that could cause strangulation.
- choose clothing that has low fire danger. Look for the fire risk label on children's nightclothes.
- have everything handy while changing nappies, or do it on the floor.

### Tip:

*Don't leave your baby alone on a bed, lounge or changing table. Just because your child hasn't rolled doesn't mean it won't*



## Feeding

- if bottle-feeding, always check the milk temperature before giving it to your baby. Microwaves heat milk unevenly so always shake the bottle to mix its contents before feeding your baby.
- never prop a bottle for your baby to feed alone.
- always put hot drinks down when holding your baby. If spilled on your child, hot drinks will cause severe scald injuries.
- when starting solids at 6 months, finely mash foods to avoid the potential of choking, then progress to coarsely mashed food.
- when giving your baby medicine, **always** read the label carefully and never give more than the recommended dose.

### Tip:

*Check the temperature of your child's bottle on the inside of your wrist*



## Sleeping

- only use a cot that meets the Australian Standard. They are easily recognised by the Safebaby tag.
- ensure all curtain cords are out of reach. Position the cot away from curtain cords that could strangle your baby.
- do not use bumpers, or pillows or toys in the cot.
- place your baby on their back to sleep.
- do not put your baby in a pram to sleep unsupervised because of the risk of smothering.
- make sure a rocking cradle cannot rock while your baby sleeps.

### Tip:

*Put only breast-milk, formula or water in your baby's bottle*

Ensure your baby's face is left uncovered. A good way to do this is put your baby's feet at the bottom of the cot so that he/she can't slip down under the blankets.



## At play

- make a safe play area for your baby away from heaters, stairs and other dangers and
- Do not hold your baby at the same time you are drinking hot liquids
- keep your child's play area clear of small items that may be a choking hazard such as beads, coins and buttons.
- store all poisons up high and out of reach. Take particular care with household cleaners and medications.

- place lids on nappy buckets and store them up high to avoid poisoning and drowning.
- separate dogs from babies, especially at the dog's feeding times.
- if you use a bouncer, place it on the floor – never on a raised surface.
- baby walkers are not recommended because of the high rate of injury.
- ensure that your pool or spa is properly fenced. Your local Council will advise you on the regulations that govern pools and spas.
- young children often get medicines out of handbags – keep handbags out of reach.

## Tip:

*Baby walkers are not recommended because of the high rate of injury*



## Toys

- toys need to be durable and washable, have smooth edges and no small parts that can be swallowed.
- check that no fur or crumbed foam from stuffed toys can be removed from the toy and swallowed or poked into noses and ears.

## Out and about

- use a Standards Australia approved pram and place all bags under the pram to avoid it overbalancing.
- always use a harness in the pram, stroller and supermarket trolley and adjust it to fit your baby every time.
- beware that little fingers can become trapped in hinges of prams, strollers and doors.
- protect your baby from the sun by dressing them in light weight long sleeved clothing and a hat, finding shade and using baby sunscreen.

## In the Car

- use a Standards Australia approved car restraint. Contact your local Council about car restraints.
- ensure that the restraint is installed correctly. An incorrectly fitted car restraint increases the risk of injury to your child.

### Tip:

*Temperatures in cars rise rapidly in the heat. Make sure your child always has access to plenty of liquids.*

- adjust the harness to fit the child on every trip.
- your baby should be travelling in a forward facing restraint when he/she reaches about 9kg in weight or 70cm in length.
- never leave your baby alone in the car. When you leave your car, take your baby with you even for small errands.

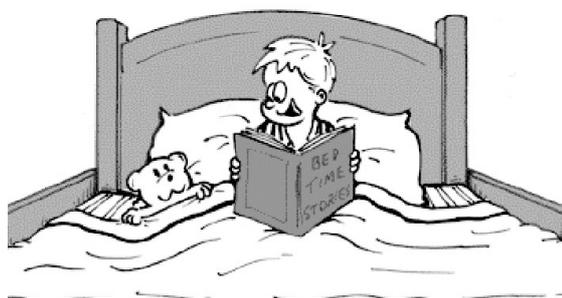


## General tips on safety

- 1** set a good example. You are a role model. Your child will watch everything you do and try to imitate you.
- 2** have a professional install or check your child car restraint.
- 3** only buy nursery furniture that displays a 'Safebaby' tag.
- 4** install a smoke alarm in your child's bedroom as well as other areas in your home.
- 5** install a pool fence that complies with regulations to reduce the risk of drowning. Seek advice from your local Council.
- 6** keep a list of emergency numbers in an obvious place in your home.

### Tip:

*Second hand nursery equipment can be unsafe, find out its history before you buy*



# Toddlers on the move

## 9–18 months

### Toddler is learning

Your baby will become increasingly mobile now and start to walk. Your baby will also become very curious wanting to open cupboards, turn switches on and off and seek out items they know exist even if they are hidden from view. At this age your baby will want to “test” everything by putting it in their mouth.

### Common safety concerns

- choking on unsuitable foods.
- falling out of the highchair, shopping trolley or pram and falling down stairs.
- scalds caused by baby turning on the hot tap in the bath and slipping over.
- pulling saucepans down from the stove spilling hot contents on them.
- accessing hazardous poisons, medications and household detergents that were previously out of reach.
- burns caused from heaters and fires without appropriate safety guards.
- being hit by vehicles in driveways.
- drowning in unfenced swimming pools and spas
- falling down stairs whilst in a baby walker
- grasping hot liquids whilst in a baby walker

## Bathing

- install a temperature controlled hot water system. The bathroom hot water should be a maximum of 50°C. Talk to your licensed plumber or the Master Plumbers Association for advice.
- when filling the bath, run the cold water first, then hot, then cold again and mix for an even temperature.
  - turn the cold water tap on first and off last.
  - do not put your child in the bath while the water is still running.
  - always test the temperature of the water before bathing your child. It should be no more than 38°C.
  - do not have electrical equipment (appliances eg hair dryer) within reach or near the bath.
- always stay with your child when bathing.
- when household distractions like the telephone or doorbell ring, ignore the distractions or take your child with you.
- do not leave a sibling to supervise a toddler in the bath.

### Tip:

*If in doubt purchase a bath thermometer - available at most chemists and babystores*



## Eating

- always harness your baby in the highchair – preferably a 5-point harness that is firmly attached to the frame of the chair.
- grate or cook hard foods. Remember that small, hard foods can choke a toddler.
- always supervise your child while eating.
- never pick up and hold your baby while you are holding a hot drink. A spill can seriously scald your child.

### Tip:

*A 5-point harness has two shoulder straps, two hip straps and a crotch strap*

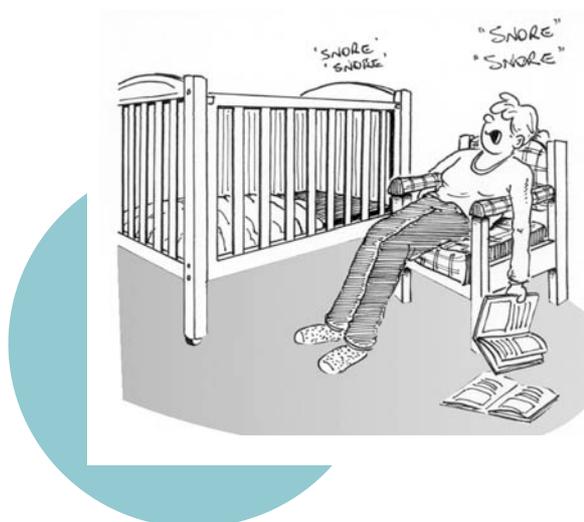


## Sleeping

- dress your baby in low fire risk clothing. Check for fire hazard labels on nightwear.
- remove any objects that would allow your baby to climb out of the cot.
- remove bib and dummy cords before lying your child down to sleep. They could strangle your baby.
- Keep the cot away from blinds and curtain cords.

### Tip:

*Putting your baby to bed with a bottle is not recommended as it can cause tooth decay*



## Around the home and at play

- never allow your child to play unsupervised with the family dog, particularly when the dog is feeding.
- nappy buckets should have a secure lid and be stored in a high place (such as in the laundry tub) - always empty nappy bucket when not in use.
- it is unsuitable to leave children to play in babywalkers unsupervised.

### In the backyard

- avoid direct exposure to the sun between 11am and 3pm when the risk is highest. Use sunscreen and dress your child in light weight long sleeves and a hat.
- ensure safety glass, safety film or wooden bars across glass at low levels.
- ensure safety barriers at entries to stairs or other areas you don't want your child to enter.
- identify any poisonous plants that may be growing in your garden and remove them.
- place a rigid wire net over water ornaments like fishponds or open drains.
- lock up and keep all pesticides, mower fuel, paints and herbicides out of the reach of children.
- erect a pool fence with tension adjustable (self-closing) polymer gate hinges and a safe, magnetic gate latch that complies with Australian Standards. Your local Council will advise you.

#### Tip:

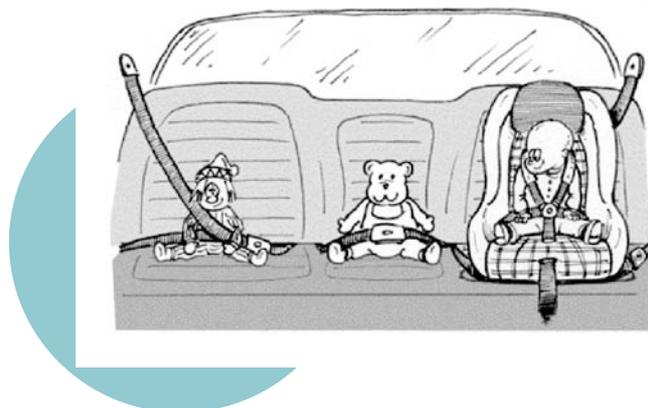
*Create a safe shady play area separated from the pool, driveway and other hazards*

- check the pool fence and gate regularly and remove objects propped against the fence that allow a toddler to climb over and access the pool.
- ensure you have emptied all containers that rainwater could collect in.
- empty wading pools after every use and store them upright or deflate them.

## Tip:

*Be aware that children can drown in less than 5cm of water*





## Out and about

- use the Standards Australia approved child restraint in the car on every trip.
- never leave a child alone in a car, no matter what the weather. Even in mild weather cars quickly become too hot for small children.
- get your child out of the car on the footpath side.
- supervise your child on play equipment and choose equipment that is appropriate for their size and level of development.
- be aware of potential risks such as unguarded pools when visiting friends.
- little fingers can become trapped in hinges of prams and strollers.
- young children often get medicines or small objects that they can choke on, out of bags – keep other people’s bags (particularly handbags) out of reach, especially grandparents.
- always use a harness in the pram, stroller and supermarket trolley and adjust to fit your child every time.

### Tip:

*There is no safe way to leave a child in a car alone in even mild weather, so don't do it!*

## General tips on safety

- 1** Attach a CPR instruction card to your pool fence.
- 2** Ensure your child car restraint suits the toddlers size and weight. Have the installation checked by a restraint fitting station.
- 3** Fence off a safe play area for a toddler that is shaded and well clear of the driveway.
- 4** Buy or build a lockable cupboard and store all your hazardous chemicals in it to prevent child access.
- 5** If you have a pool you must ensure appropriate child resistant barriers are in place that restrict access between the residence and the swimming pool. Check with your local Council to ensure it meets regulations.
- 6** Establish family rules when in or around your pool.
- 7** Keep toddlers away from dogs when the dogs are being fed.
- 8** Only buy toys that are suitable for the age and development of your toddler.

# Inquisitive, illusive and invincible

## 18 months – 3 years

### Skills your child is learning

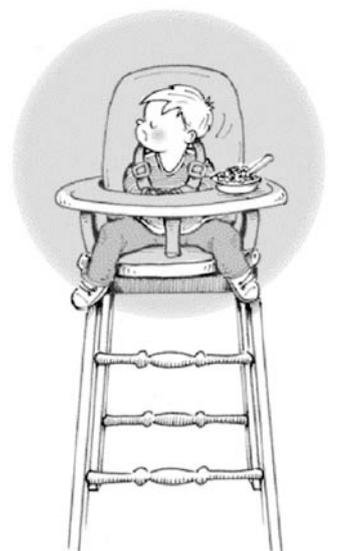
Your child is now actively exploring their environment. They want to do everything without help or interference by the parent. Your child will begin to run and jump without fear of heights or danger. The smell, taste and texture of things become fascinating. This is when three out of every four children will incur an injury, many of whom are hospitalised.

### Common safety concerns

- a child's body is top heavy and their lack of balance causes them to overbalance easily.
- getting into cupboards where poisons and medicines are stored.
- climbing and jumping off furniture and running into sharp objects.
- scald injuries from hot water are common in this age group due to pulling hot utensils or cups with hot contents down from the stove, bench or table.
- falling from playground equipment.
- running onto the road without looking , for example, after a ball.
- driving over small children in driveways because they are difficult to see.

## Feeding

- always use a 5-point harness in the highchair.
  - introduce appropriate eating behaviour to quieten your child while eating.
  - supervise your child when eating popcorn, hard lollies or chips. Fresh food such as apples and carrots need to be cut/sliced into small pieces. Nuts are not recommended for children under 5 years.



### Tip:

*A 5-point high chair has anchor points above both shoulders, beside each hip and at the crotch*

## Bathing

- restrict your child's access to the bathroom when it is not in use. Close the door.
- never leave your child unsupervised in the bath.
- when filling the bath, run the cold water first, then hot, then cold again and mix for an even temperature.
- do not have electrical appliances within reach or near the bath.
- do not leave a sibling to supervise small children in the bath.

### Tip:

*Also restrict your child's access to the laundry and kitchen as these can be dangerous places for your child*





## Sleeping

- your child might start to climb out of the cot. It may be time to leave the sides down or move your child into a bed.
- bunk beds are not designed for children to play on and not recommended for children under 9 years of age.
- check the smoke alarm batteries in the bedroom regularly.
- install night-lights to allow your child to confidently find the toilet.

## Around the home

- buy toys appropriate for your child's age.
- ensure that poisons are stored away safely – preferably in a cupboard with a child-resistant lock located at least 1.5m from the ground.
- use safety glass in low windows and doors or attach shatter resistant film.
- pad sharp corners on furniture.
- be aware that little fingers can be amputated by door hinges – prop doors open or use finger jam protectors.
- keep hot objects (such as iron) out of reach.
- keep children out of the way of cars backing in our out of driveways or carports.

**Do not let your child play on the driveway or carport.**

### Tip:

*Most children's toys will display the appropriate age of use. This is important as toys designed for older children may have parts that a younger child may choke or injure themselves on*

## At play out and about

- look out for water hazards. Fountains, creeks, dams and swimming pools expose the child to the risk of drowning.
- always hold your child's hand near the road and start teaching them to help you look for traffic before crossing.
- make it clear to your child that the road is a dangerous place.

## Car Safety

- use a Standards Australia approved car seat which is adjusted as your child grows, the child should stay in the seat until they are simply too big for it or it no longer provides protection or suitable support for your child's head.
- never leave your child alone or unsupervised in the car. Take your child with you, even for short errands.



## In the backyard

- always supervise your child near water.
- if you have a pool you must ensure appropriate child resistant barriers are in place that restrict access between the residence and the swimming pool. Check with your local Council to ensure it meets regulations. For more information see page 33.
- dress your child in a hat and long sleeves and use sunscreen that is suitable for young children. Ask a pharmacist for help.
- supervise your children when they are playing with dogs.
- buy or build only play equipment that meets the Australian Standard and is suitable for your child's age, size and stage of development.

### Tip:

*Never take your eyes off children when they are playing near or in water*

- place impact absorbing material under play equipment.
- dress your child in low fire risk clothes to minimise the risk of catching fire.
- lock weed sprays, fertilisers and garden equipment in a garden shed.
- clear out any junk from the backyard.
- make sure your child wears a safety Standards Australia approved helmet when riding a tricycle, scooter or bicycle.
- make sure children do not play on the driveway, footpath or road.
- always supervise your child whilst playing.

## General tips on safety

- 1** Ensure you have current CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation) skills.
- 2** Attach a CPR instruction card to your pool fence.
- 3** Have Emergency Services telephone numbers by your telephone in case of an emergency.
- 4** Ensure your child car restraint suits the child's size and weight. Have the installation checked by a restraint fitting station.
- 5** Fence off a safe play area for a toddler that is shaded and well clear of the driveway.
- 6** Buy or build a lockable cupboard and store all your hazardous chemicals in it to prevent child access.
- 7** If you have a pool you must ensure appropriate child resistant barriers are in place that restrict access between the residence and the swimming pool. Check with your local council to ensure it meets regulations.
- 8** Keep children away from dogs when the dogs are being fed.
- 9** Only buy toys that are suitable for the age and development of your child.
- 10** Be a good role model. Hold your child's hand in the street. Obey traffic signals and talk about how you decide when and where to cross the road.

# Pre-schoolers: independent adventurers

## 3–5 years

### **Skills your child is learning**

Your child is now becoming increasingly independent and adventurous. At this age your child has little understanding of danger. Favourite pastimes include climbing. The best injury prevention measure is adult supervision.

### **Common safety concerns**

- falling from a bicycle, scooter, playground equipment and in the home.
- children under five are particularly at risk of dog bites and often require hospital treatment.
- the backyard pool is the greatest killer of children under five.
- scald injuries incur the longest hospital stays often with lifelong scarring.
- incidents often occur with children running across the road or playing near the road.

## At home

- begin teaching your child about safety around the home.
- don't leave handbags and grocery shopping containing personal hygiene products, detergents and household cleaners lying around. These potential poisons are easily accessed by an inquisitive child.
- keep matches and cigarette lighters out of reach.
  - keep medicines up high, out of reach and locked away.
  - work out a fire escape plan in case of an emergency and practice it regularly.
  - teach your child how to **GET DOWN LOW** and **GO, GO, GO** if caught in a fire and how to **STOP, DROP** and **ROLL** if the child's clothes catch on fire.
  - use safety glass in low windows and doors or use shatter resistant film.
- replace any broken glass panes with safety glass.

### Tip:

*Be careful as medicines look like lollies to young children. They are colourful and appealing*



## At play

- choose play equipment suitable for your child's age, size and stage of development.
- trampolines can be dangerous! Set your trampoline in the ground and put protectors over springs. The rule is: 'One kid at a time!'
- buy a Standards Australia approved helmet for your child. Ensure that it is properly fitted and enforce that it is worn every time your child rides a bicycle, skateboard or scooter.
- Place impact absorbing material that applies to the Australian Standards under play equipment.

### Tip:

*Many new trampolines also have netting. This can help stop your child from injuring themselves*

- remove low branches at children's eye level from trees and bushes.
- dress your child in low fire risk clothes.
- teach your child how to play safely with your dog. Keep children away from dogs when the dogs are eating.

- always supervise your child in or around water.
- if you have a pool you must ensure appropriate child resistant barriers are in place that restrict access between the residence and the swimming pool. Check with your local Council to ensure it meets regulations.

## On the street

- always hold your child's hand when near the road and explain what your child should look for.
- teach your child about **STOP, LOOK, LISTEN** and **THINK**.

### Tip:

*When backing out of a driveway if ever in doubt place your child in the car with you*

- never allow your child to ride a bike, scooter or skateboard on the road.
- keep children out of the way of cars backing in or out of driveways or carports.



## In the car

- never leave your child alone in the car.  
When you leave your car, take your child with you – even for small errands.
- use the appropriate Standards Australia approved restraint on every trip.
- a booster seat should be rigid with a back, side wings and a sash guide to keep the belt in place. You should always use a harness in conjunction with a seatbelt, never a booster seat or cushion with just a lap only seat belt.
- double check that the harness fits your child. Lightweight summer clothing may require you to tighten the harness.

### Tip:

*The temperature inside your car can increase by more than 30°C within fifteen minutes*

- provide plenty of cool fluids regularly to avoid dehydration.
- dress children appropriately to promote free air flow around their bodies.



## General tips on safety

- 1** Teach your child basic water awareness and how to swim. Enrol them in professional swimming lessons.
- 2** Buy a helmet, elbow and knee pads and a wrist guard to protect your child when riding small wheeled toys.
- 3** Start sound road safety practices and behaviour.
- 4** Develop a family emergency plan in case of fire.
- 5** Ask your local Council if your pool fence and self closing gate meet regulations.
- 6** Establish rules when in or around your pool.
- 7** Establish a rule that children are kept away from dogs when the dogs are being fed.
- 8** Only buy toys that are suitable for the age and development of your child.
- 9** List of emergency numbers in an easily accessible and visible place.
- 10** Teach your child/children about phoning **000** in an emergency.
- 11** Know CPR, the best way to do this is to take part in a course.

## Injury Prevention Resources

### General information Resources

#### Injury Prevention and Child Safety Information Websites

- [www.health.nsw.gov.au/living/prev.html](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/living/prev.html)
- [www.kidsafensw.org/](http://www.kidsafensw.org/)
- [www.chw.edu.au/parents/kidshealth/](http://www.chw.edu.au/parents/kidshealth/)

#### Child Safety Topics (in alphabetical order)

### Road safety, car restraints and bicycle helmets

- [www.kidsafensw.org/roadsafety/](http://www.kidsafensw.org/roadsafety/)
- [www.rta.nsw.gov.au/roadsafety/](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/roadsafety/)

### Dental care

- [www.health.nsw.gov.au/topics/babyteeth.html](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/topics/babyteeth.html)

### Home Renovations

- [www.diysafe.nsw.gov.au](http://www.diysafe.nsw.gov.au)

### Nursery furniture

- [www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/](http://www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/)

### Poisonous plants

- [www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/](http://www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/)

### Pool fencing

- [www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/information/swim.pdf](http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/information/swim.pdf)
- [www.safewaters.nsw.gov.au/fencepools.htm](http://www.safewaters.nsw.gov.au/fencepools.htm)

### Preventing Scalds

- [www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/](http://www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/)

## Smoke alarms

- [www.fire.nsw.gov.au/community/alarms\\_smoke.htm](http://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/community/alarms_smoke.htm)

## Children's fascination with fire

- [www.fire.nsw.gov.au/education/publications/factsheets/15\\_children\\_fascination.htm](http://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/education/publications/factsheets/15_children_fascination.htm)

## Sun and skincare

- [www.cancercouncil.com.au/editorial.asp?pageid=400#1](http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/editorial.asp?pageid=400#1)

## Water Safety

- [www.safewaters.nsw.gov.au/](http://www.safewaters.nsw.gov.au/)

# Acknowledgments

## Information and illustrations adapted from Kidsafe Victoria factsheets

All fact sheets are accessible from the website

- [www.kidsafevic.com.au](http://www.kidsafevic.com.au)

