

## Study finds novice parents overlook many child-injury risks

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. -University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Department of Psychology researchers report that new parents identified less than half of the safety hazards in a simulated home environment, and most perceived that their children were less vulnerable to injuries than other children.

The findings will be published in an upcoming issue of the journal *Accident Analysis and Prevention*. UAB doctoral student Joanna Gaines, M.A., is the lead author of the study, and UAB pediatric psychologist David Schwebel, Ph.D., is its co-author.

The study found that parents recognized only 47 percent of the safety hazards placed inside a home setting.

"While there were no benchmarks to assess whether this is a good or bad rate of recognition, it is concerning if it approximates behavior in real homes," the authors said. "One would hope that parents might recognize all or almost all of the safety hazards present. If they don't recognize hazards, they cannot act for prevention, thus placing their [children](#) at risk of serious injury."

Surprisingly, when asked to identify hazards they considered dangerous for their own children, the parents identified only 40 percent of the hazards. The study's authors said that after the test, many of the parents made statements such as "My child isn't curious about the toilet," or "My child knows not to play with matches." The results suggest that parents

tend to perceive their children as being somewhat invulnerable or smarter, safer or developmentally more advanced than other children, Gaines said.

## **Home Injuries**

Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death for toddlers in the United States, according to the National Center for [Injury Prevention and Control](#) (NCIPC). In fact, the NCIPC reports that more than 1,300 1- and 2-year-old American children died from accidental injuries in 2005.

## **The Study**

Researchers tested 94 individuals, including 44 parents whose oldest child was 12-36 months, 30 day-care workers and 20 health-care professionals. A living room and a typical toddler's bedroom were created in the laboratory to simulate a home environment. For a third room, they used an existing bathroom with a working sink, shower and toilet. In each room, the researchers placed items that were safety hazards for young children such as prescription medication, shower cleaner, a pair of scissors, overloaded electrical outlets and marbles.

Each participant was asked to place stickers on all items in the three rooms that they believed would be a hazard to children ages 12-36 months. Researchers also asked the parents to complete a second task to identify hazards they believed would be dangerous for their own toddlers. The order the two tasks performed was alternated randomly.

The parents answered questions about their level of education, knowledge of CPR, attendance at parenting classes and the number of hours each week spent reading parenting magazines.

The study found that formal education was not related to hazard recognition, Gaines said. Parents with fewer years of education recognized safety hazards just as well as parents with more education. But the study also found that more hazards were identified by adults with more parent-related education, which suggests these classes and magazine articles focused on injury prevention may benefit child safety.

The parents, however, recognized more hazards than the professionals who worked with children daily, the study authors said. The health professionals recognized only 29 percent of the hazards, and the day-care workers recognized 37 percent. Some explanations may include the fact that parents spend more time with toddlers than day-care employees and parents have more invested in safeguarding their own children. In addition, [parents](#) have more experience watching children in a home environment than most child-care professionals.

Source: University of Alabama at Birmingham ([news](#) : [web](#))

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