

Keeping baby safe in his or her first year

September 5 2011, By Susan Rzucidlo

The first year with a new baby is an exciting, joyful time that means big changes for the whole family. However, it's also a time when new parents have to think about the safety of their baby, especially in the home and car. Children from birth to age one are more likely to die from accidents than older children. The leading causes of deaths from accidents at this age are suffocation, motor vehicle crashes, drowning, home fire or burn injury, falls, and poisoning. It is important that parents share safety tips with all caregivers including grandparents, child care providers and baby sitters so that the baby is safe wherever they are.

Babies spend most of their time sleeping. So creating a safe place for a baby to sleep is a top priority to remind parents and caregivers of infants during September, which is Baby Safety Month. Two out of three [babies](#) who die from injury in their first year of life die from suffocation, which prevents them from breathing. Many of these deaths happen when babies sleep in an unsafe way. Research shows that almost all of these tragedies can be prevented.

Remember the ABCs of safe sleep for babies: Babies should sleep **ALONE**, on their **BACKS**, in a **CRIB**. The crib should be in the parents' room, if possible. It should meet all safety standards and have a firm mattress with a tight-fitting sheet. The crib should be empty except for the baby -- no pillows, no comforters, no soft bedding or stuffed animals. These can suffocate a baby.

Here are five important things that all parents or caregivers should do to help keep babies safe:

1. Make a place for babies to sleep by themselves. This can be in the parent's room to make things like breastfeeding easier. This is called room sharing. But parents should not let a baby sleep in their bed. Bed sharing is not safe for babies as the adult or another child can rollover and suffocate the infant. Also, bedding and pillows in an adult or another child's bed can lead to suffocation.

2. Put the baby in a safe place when you are cooking or carrying hot foods and liquids. Most scald burns in young children are from spilled hot foods and liquids. This is especially true for children ages 6 months to 2 years. The safe place can be a high chair, crib, play yard or any other safe environment. If possible, use a travel mug with a top to protect children in case your hot drink tips over.

3. Keep babies away from water. A baby can drown in as little as an inch or two of water. Babies under one year who drown often do so in bathtubs, 5-gallon buckets, and toilets. It can happen the moment your back is turned. Put outside locks on all bathroom doors. Use toilet latches. Empty buckets and wading pools after using them and store them upside down. Never leave a baby alone in or near water – not even for a second. You need to protect them from drowning and also from being burned by hot tap water.

4. Keep babies and toddlers in rear-facing car seats. There are new rules for baby safety in cars and other vehicles. Research from the American Academy of Pediatrics shows that babies and toddlers will be safer if you keep them in a rear-facing child safety seat in a back seat for as long as possible – until they are at least two years old and weigh at least 20 pounds. Also, never leave your child alone in a car--even for one minute. Heat stroke can injure or kill them. Also make an appointment to have a certified car seat technician check your car seat. Four out of five car seats are on recall or installed incorrectly.

5. Be prepared for what your baby will do next. The trick to keeping children safe is to stay one step ahead of them. A baby will wiggle, kick, roll over, chew a toy, move around, pull up, crawl, take first steps and walk. Even if your baby can't do all of these things right now, there's always a first time. As babies grow, they will learn to do new things that could hurt them. You should take steps to keep your baby safe today. But you should also think about what you need to do now to keep the baby safe tomorrow. This is true for anyplace your baby spends time, so make sure safety is in place wherever they go.

Baby Safety Month is an annual observance led in September by the Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association. If you would like more information about baby safety topics visit www.safekids.org or call 717-531-SAFE (7233) to the Pediatric Trauma and Injury Prevention Program at Penn State Hershey Children's Hospital and lead agency for Safe Kids Dauphin County.

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