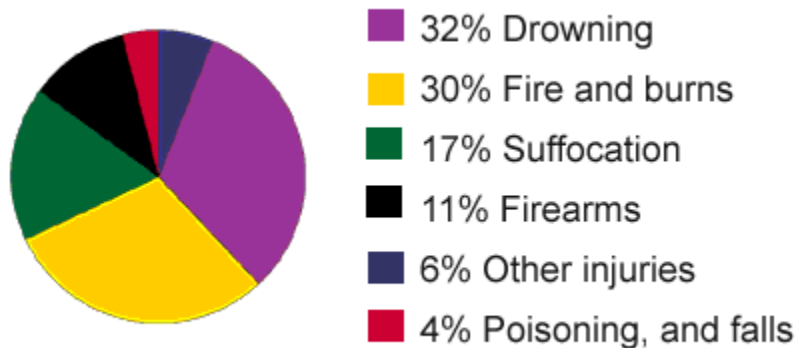


- Home Safety -

From 1989-1998, 126 Contra Costa children under the age of 14 died as a result of unintentional injuries, often called “accidents.” More than a third (37%) of these deaths happened at home. Most home injury deaths are caused by drowning, choking, suffocation, fire, burns, firearms, poisoning and falls. In Contra Costa, almost 70% of these home injury deaths were to children ages 4 and under. From 1991-97, an estimated 1,242 children ages 14 and under were treated in local emergency rooms for home injuries.



(Chart #1 – pie graph of home injuries) Caption for chart: From 1989-1998, a total of 47 Contra Costa children ages 0-14 died as a result of unintentional injuries that happened in and around the home. Fifteen children (32%) died from drowning, 14 (30%) died from fires and burns, eight (17%) from suffocation, five (11%) from unintentional firearm injury, two (4%) from poisoning and three (6%) from other causes, including falls.

Here are a few important prevention tips on each type of injury. Check the resources at the end for more.



Drowning is the leading cause of home death for Contra Costa children under 14 years old. Most drownings and near-drownings occur in residential swimming pools. Children can also drown in as little as one inch of water and therefore have drowned in wading pools, buckets, diaper pails, toilets and bathtubs.

- *Never* leave a child alone near any body of water, even for a few seconds.
- Teach your child to swim.
- Keep children away from filled buckets and empty all buckets when done using them.
- In a boat, *always* use life jackets.
- If you have a pool, fence it on all four sides at least five feet high, with a self-closing, self-latching gate. In Contra Costa County, this is the law.



Fire and burns are the second leading cause of local home injury deaths for children ages 14 and under. A working smoke alarm is not present in two-thirds of residential fires in which a child is killed or injured. Fires caused by children playing with matches and lighters are the leading cause of fire-related death and injury to children.

- Make sure your home has a working fire alarm.
- Make and practice a fire escape plan.
- Keep cigarettes, matches and lighters out of reach of children.
- Do not smoke in bed.
- Never leave food on a stove unattended.



Suffocation, choking and strangulation (often called airway obstruction injuries) are the third leading cause of home injury death for Contra Costa children under 14. For infants, 60% of suffocations occur in the sleeping are. Choking is mainly from eating small round items, such as grapes, hot dogs, balloons and hard candy. Strangulation happens when items become wrapped around necks, such as clothing drawstrings, ribbons, necklaces, and window blind and drapery cords.

- Place infants on their backs on a firm, flat mattress in a crib that meets national safety standards.
- Take pillows, comforters and soft toys from the crib.
- Always watch young children when they are eating and playing. Children under age six should not eat small, round or hard foods.
- Tie up all window blind and drapery cords.
- Remove head and neck drawstrings from clothing.



Firearm related injuries are the fourth leading cause of injury deaths in Contra Costa children under 14. About 40% of all U.S. homes have a firearm, and up to one-half of gun owners keep them loaded. Most deaths involve guns that have been kept loaded and accessible to children and occur when children play with loaded guns.

- Guns should not be kept in the home.
- If you have guns in your home, keep them unloaded, locked and out of reach of children.
- Store guns and ammunition in separate locked locations. Buy guns with trigger locks.



Poisonings are the fifth leading cause of home injury death for Contra Costa children under 14. Sixty percent of these poisonings are by caused by items such as paint, cleaning substances, plants, cosmetics, toys, pesticides, art supplies and alcohol; 40% are by medicines. More than 595 children in the county were identified with high blood lead levels, mainly from breathing or eating dust or chips from lead-based paint. This can severely affect intelligence, growth and behavior. More than 80% of housing built before 1980 contain lead-based paint.

- Store and lock all household products and medicine out of sight and reach of children.
- Always ask for child-resistant packaging of medicine.
- Test homes built before 1978 for lead-based paint.
- Ask a doctor to screen your child for lead poisoning if you think they were exposed.



Falls are the sixth leading cause of home-related deaths, but remain the leading cause of unintentional injury for children. Head injuries from falls cause the majority of deaths and severe injuries. Children under age 10 are at the greatest risk of injury because of their natural curiosity and undeveloped motor skills. Babies most often fall from furniture, stairs and baby walkers. Toddlers are at risk of falling out of a window.

- Never use a baby walker with wheels.
- Use safety gates at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Move chairs and furniture away from windows. Install window guards on windows above the first floor.

Prevention Tips for Providers

Education. Your agency can educate and train parents and caregivers on basic home safety guidelines. Make sure that your staff is trained and has good, factual tools and materials (check out the websites!). If you're a medical provider, talk about home safety with parents/caregivers and give home safety checklists during office visits. Community organizations can send home safety information by mail and feature it in newsletters.

Enforcement. Providers and coalitions can advocate for policies that regulate toys, swimming pools, smoke alarms and firearms – and for making sure those policies are enforced. The Contra Costa Childhood Injury Prevention Coalition recently petitioned for the removal of unsafe baby bath seats from the market, declaring them a hazard due to drownings associated with a specific type of bath seat.

Engineering. Create or advocate for a hazard-free environment through design of safe products and environments that are child-safe. Examples include safety caps on medication bottles, window blinds without cords and fencing around residential swimming pools.

Please check out the following websites for detailed home safety checklists and prevention information:

1. California Center for Injury Prevention: <http://www.injuryprevention.org>
2. Safety Rules: <http://www.safetyrules.health.wa.gov.au>
3. National Center for Injury Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc>
4. National Safe Kids Coalition: <http://www.safekids.org>
5. Paranoid Sisters: <http://www.paranoidsisters.org>

Local Resources

Drowning Prevention Foundation
<http://www.drownprevention.com>

The Danny Foundation for Crib and Child Product Safety
<http://www.dannyfoundation.org>

The Lead Poisoning Prevention Project
Community Wellness & Prevention Program
<http://www.ccpredvention.org>

Contra Costa Child Care Council
<http://www.cocokids.org>

Other Resources

These websites contain educational materials, publications, programs, recent legislation and other important information. For a complete list of child injury prevention resources please click here.

The National Program for Playground Safety
<http://www.uni.edu/playground>

Burn Prevention Foundation
<http://www.burnprevention.org>

U.S. Poison Control Centers
<http://www.kidshealth.org>

National Safe Kids Coalition
<http://www.safekids.org>

Consumer Product Safety Commission
<http://www.cpsc.gov>

California Center for Injury Prevention
<http://www.injuryprevention.org>