

Central Office:  
505 Silas Deane Highway  
Wethersfield, CT 06109  
Phone (860) 721-2822  
Fax (860) 721-2823

Berlin Office:  
240 Kensington Road  
Berlin, CT 06037  
Phone (860) 828-7017  
Fax (860) 828-9248

Newington Office:  
131 Cedar Street  
Newington, CT 06111  
Phone (860) 665-8586  
Fax (860) 665-8533

Rocky Hill Office:  
761 Old Main Street  
Rocky Hill, CT 06067  
Phone (860) 258-2770  
Fax: (860) 258-2767

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### **It's Up to Adults to Protect Children from Injuries**

As Labor Day approaches and summer is ending, we realize that long days spent outdoors will soon be over, and both children and adults will begin to spend more and more time indoors. While we should never become complacent about safety in all our activities, this is a good time to reassess the safety of our homes, particularly with regard to hazards for children. That is why the week of September 1-9<sup>th</sup> has been designated National Childhood Injury Prevention Week.

While we like to think of our homes as safe places, the reality is that there are numerous threats to safety, particularly for the youngest of us. Each year, accidental injury kills more children in the United States than disease, violence, and suicide combined, according to the National Safe Kids Campaign, and children under the age of 5 are at the greatest risk. The As Safe As Possible Campaign notes that for each injury-related death, 45 injured children are hospitalized, and another 1300 require treatment in the emergency department. And these figures fail to account for all the children who are treated in a doctor's office, by the school nurse, or by a family member at home. It is estimated that over 20 million children will require medical attention for accidental injuries in this country; of those, 360,000 will require hospitalization and 10,400,000 will be treated in emergency rooms. But perhaps the most heartbreaking realization is the fact that by taking simple precautions, almost 90% of these injuries can be avoided, according to Safe Kids Worldwide.

The Home Safety Council conducted a Parents' Perception survey and found that most parents believe their own homes are safe – yet, 60% of parents surveyed revealed that additional actions could be taken to reduce the risk of a household member suffering a home-related injury. The reasons reported for not taking further action included not knowing which actions to take (32%), lack of time (24%), the expense of home improvements (13%), and the belief that other safety issues are more important (9%). As a result, some parents with young children are ignoring the greatest injury risks for this age group. The Home Safety Council reports that “children ages 14 and under are disproportionately at risk of suffering a home injury fatality.” The leading cause of death in that age group was due to injuries sustained from fires and burns, and the leading cause of non-fatal injuries for children of this age was falls. Further, young children also had the highest rate of non-fatal injury from poison exposure.

So, what can a parent do? The As Safe As Possible Campaign and Safe Kids offer a number of tips that only take minutes to accomplish:

Fires and Burns – Keep children a safe distance from stoves and portable heaters, lock up matches and lighters, install smoke detectors on every level of the home and outside sleeping areas, check smoke detector batteries regularly, keep a fire extinguisher on hand, test bath water and set hot water heaters no higher than 120<sup>o</sup> F.

Falls – Secure all windows, doors, tops and bottoms of stairways, loose floor coverings and rugs. Keep all furniture away from windows. Remove all tripping hazards, install non-slip surfaces in the bathroom, and properly illuminate all areas, particularly the tops and bottoms of stairways. Install

safety gates at the tops and bottoms of staircases when toddlers are present, and be sure hand-railings that extend the full length of the stairs are installed on both sides.

**Poisoning** – Lock dangerous items, such as medicines, cleaners, paints, insecticides, health and beauty aids, knives and other sharp objects, out of children’s reach. Use child-resistant containers, and always close them completely. Learn the Poison Control Hotline phone number, and keep it near the telephone (1-800-222-1222).

**Choking** – Check the entire house and remove small objects that can become choking hazards, always watch children when they are eating, and do not permit children under the age of 3 to eat small, round, or hard food.

**Strangulation and Suffocation** – Make sure all cord, wires, and strings are no longer than 10”, and put all plastic bags and wrappings where children cannot reach them.

**Electrical** – Cover unused electrical outlets with child safety devices, keep plugs “locked,” and secure cords to baseboards.

One important point to emphasize is that even if all proper safety precautions are taken, young children must be supervised by a responsible adult at all times. To obtain further information about child injury prevention and unintentional injuries, visit the Home Safety Council’s website at [www.homesafetycouncil.org](http://www.homesafetycouncil.org) (202-330-4900), the As Safe As Possible Campaign at [www.assafeaspossible.org](http://www.assafeaspossible.org), the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at [www.cdc.gov/ncipc](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc) (1-800-232-4636), and Safe Kids Worldwide at [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org) (202-662-0600). Additional information about this or other public health concerns is available at the Central Connecticut Health District at [www.ccthd.org](http://www.ccthd.org) (860-721-2822).