

Prenatal Education

Key Messages for Ontario



Newborn Safety

Key Messages

Keep your baby safe. Take steps to protect and create a safe environment for your new baby.

Injury is the leading cause of death among children in Canada. Some of the biggest dangers to babies are car crashes, choking, suffocation, strangulation, falling, drowning, and burns. The majority of these injuries can be prevented.

Recognize everyday risks and take precautions. Think about babies and the new skills they develop over time and prepare for new dangers as your baby becomes more mobile. Actively supervise your baby at all times and pay extra attention when there are distractions. The best way to protect your baby from injuries is to

- ▶ Stay close to your baby.
- ▶ Keep a close eye on your baby.
- ▶ Be able to hear the noises your baby makes.

At all times, when you have to move away from your baby, put your baby in a safe place like a crib, cradle or bassinet.

Provide a safe sleeping environment to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and injury or death from suffocation or strangulation.

There are ways to reduce the risks of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death:

- ▶ Breastfeed your baby to reduce the risk of SIDS.
- ▶ Keep your baby in your room next to your bed for the first six months; this is called room-sharing.
- ▶ Right from birth, always place your baby on his back to sleep, at naptime and nighttime.
- ▶ Place your baby to sleep on a separate sleep surface in an age-appropriate crib, cradle, or bassinet that meets current Canadian safety regulations. Keep in mind that:
 - ▶ Bed sharing or sharing any sleep surface with your baby is not safe.
 - ▶ Items that are not approved sleep surfaces for babies include, baby seats, swings, car seats, bouncers, strollers, slings, playpens, and infant sleeping devices placed into or attached to the side of an adult bed.
- ▶ The safest place for your baby to sleep is in a crib, cradle, or bassinet.

- ▶ Provide a sleep surface that is firm and flat.
- ▶ Ensure your baby's crib is free of items such as pillows, comforters, duvets/quilts, stuffed animals, bumper pads, positioning supports or other loose or soft bedding materials that could suffocate or smother a baby.
- ▶ If you breastfeed your baby where you sleep, put your baby back to sleep in a crib, cradle, or bassinet when you are ready to go to sleep. Bed sharing or sharing any sleep surface with your baby is not safe. The safest place for your baby to sleep is in a crib, cradle, or bassinet.
- ▶ Dress your baby in comfortable, fitted, one-piece sleepwear.
- ▶ Avoid overheating your baby. A room temperature that is comfortable for you is comfortable for your baby.
- ▶ Provide a smoke-free environment for your baby.

There are many ways to calm and settle your baby.

There are many ways to soothe a baby. If your baby is fussing:

- ▶ Check to see if your baby needs a diaper change.
- ▶ Feed your baby if she is hungry.
- ▶ Add or remove a layer of clothing if she feels cold or warm.
- ▶ Hold your baby skin-to-skin.
- ▶ Use motion, such as going for a walk with your baby in a stroller or carrier.

Some people like to swaddle a fussing baby. Swaddling is controversial. If you choose to swaddle your baby, it is safer if you:

- ▶ Follow your baby's cues and don't swaddle if your baby resists.
- ▶ Use a lightweight blanket and dress your baby in a light sleeper or onesie to avoid overheating.
- ▶ Swaddle your baby so that he can bend his legs.
- ▶ Keep your baby's head uncovered and the hands free so you can see your baby's feeding cues.
- ▶ Always place your baby on his back to sleep in a crib, cradle, or bassinet.
- ▶ Stop swaddling by 2 months of age or before your baby learns to roll over.

Never shake or hit your baby. If you feel unable to cope or are afraid that you may hurt your baby, place your baby in a safe spot. Then call someone for help.

Shaking your baby can cause serious injury to your baby's neck and can cause brain damage, seizures, and even death. Crying is the main reason caregivers harm a baby.

If you are having a hard time coping with your baby's crying:

- ▶ Ask for help and have someone who you can call for breaks and rest.
- ▶ Only leave your baby with caregivers you trust and who can control their emotions.
- ▶ If you become angry, put your baby in a safe place (approved crib, cradle or bassinet) and call a close friend or family member.
- ▶ Talk to your health care provider or a family member especially if you are experiencing any of the following:
 - ▶ Feeling anxious.
 - ▶ Worried more than usual.
 - ▶ Less interested in your usual activities.
 - ▶ Have been feeling down, sad, irritable, or hopeless for more than two weeks.
- ▶ See the Mental Health key messages for more information about the baby blues and postpartum depression, and to learn about resources in your community.

Use a rear-facing car seat to travel with your baby in any car.

It is safest to use a rear-facing car seat as long as possible. Read the manufacturer's instructions and follow all age, height, and weight specifications.

Keep in mind the following guidelines:

- ▶ Only use a car seat with the National Safety Mark label on it. Check the packaging or the back of the car seat for this symbol.
- ▶ Check the car seat's expiry date. Car seats manufactured before December 2012 may not meet safety regulations.
- ▶ Follow the directions that come with the car seat for installation and use.
- ▶ Install the car seat in the back seat at all times.
- ▶ Thread harness straps just at or below your baby's shoulders. The chest clip should be at armpit level, and the harness should fit snugly.
- ▶ Look for a car seat clinic where your car seat installation can be double-checked by experts.
- ▶ Dress your baby in regular indoor clothing. You can use a blanket on top and a hat for warmth if needed. Snowsuits or bunting bags will interfere with buckling up your baby securely.
- ▶ Only use a car seat that is undamaged. Any signs of damage can make a car seat unsafe. It is not safe to use a car seat that has been in a car crash, even a minor one.
- ▶ Ensure your baby is never left unattended in a car, even for a short time.
- ▶ Be aware of the risk of your baby overheating in a car that is too hot.

- ▶ Place car seats on the floor (safest place) and not on the counter, table, or other high places. Car seats are unsteady and can easily fall from high places.
- ▶ Use a combination stroller/car seat for public transportation. It is the safest option.
- ▶ Use a car seat only for travel. Remove your baby from the car seat once you have reached your destination.

Protect your baby from falls.

Falls are a leading cause of injury in children under 1 year of age.

Ways to prevent falls include the following:

- ▶ Be within arms' reach of your baby when your baby is on a raised surface like a change table, counter, or sofa.
- ▶ Deal with distractions when you are finished caring for your baby (example: phone or doorbell ringing), or take your baby with you.
- ▶ Store everything you need to change your baby within easy reach so that you do not have to turn away.
- ▶ Make sure your baby carrier is appropriate for your baby's age and size so your baby can't slip out and fall. If you bend over, hold your baby against you with one hand.
- ▶ Assess your home for tripping hazards.
- ▶ Supervise young siblings when they are holding or caring for the baby.

Protect your baby at bath time from drowning.

A baby can drown in as little as 5 cm (2 inches) of water.

To reduce the risk of drowning at bath time:

- ▶ Always have at least one hand on your baby when in the bathtub or any water. Bath rings and bath seats are not safe.
- ▶ Have everything you need for bathing at hand so that you never have to turn away.
- ▶ Always supervise your baby when bathing your baby with another child.
- ▶ Ignore distractions such as ringing phones and doorbells during bath time. If you must answer the phone or door, take your baby with you.

Protect your baby from choking, suffocation, and strangulation.

Choking, suffocation, or strangulation may slow or stop a baby's breathing, and the baby's brain may not get enough oxygen. This can lead to injury or death.

To reduce the risk of choking, suffocation, and strangulation:

- ▶ Ensure your baby has a safe place to sleep with no loose items. See the safe sleep tips above.
- ▶ If you choose to give your baby a pacifier (soother), make sure it is one piece with a shield to prevent her from sucking the nipple too far into her mouth. Discard a pacifier that shows signs of wear or is more than two months old. Use a clip to secure it to your baby's clothing. Ribbons, cord, and necklaces (including amber) can get wrapped around your baby's neck and are a strangulation hazard.
- ▶ Use a neck warmer instead of a scarf and mitten clips instead of strings.
- ▶ Ensure that your baby is "visible and kissable" when your baby is in a sling or other baby carrier (the face is in view and close enough to kiss; the nose and mouth are uncovered; the neck is straight with the chin off the chest).

Protect your baby from burns or scalds.

You can take steps to reduce the risk of burns and scalding:

- ▶ Install smoke alarms on every level of the home and in every sleeping area. Test your smoke alarms monthly and change the batteries twice a year.
- ▶ Keep your home smoke-free. Many house fires are caused by careless smoking or children playing with lighters and matches.
- ▶ Set your hot water heater temperature to 49°C (120°F), or put an anti-scald device on your faucets. A baby's skin burns more easily than an adult's skin.
- ▶ Before bathing, check the water temperature with your elbow or wrist. It should feel warm, not hot. Bathe your baby away from the faucets, and remove your baby from the tub before running the hot water.
- ▶ Put any hot beverages down before picking up or holding a baby.
- ▶ Do not use a tablecloth that your baby might pull and cause hot liquid to spill.
- ▶ Warm up breastmilk and other baby food in a bowl of hot water and test the milk on your wrist before feeding. Microwaving can create hot spots that can burn a baby's mouth.

Protect your baby from the sun.

Too much exposure to the sun has been linked to a higher risk of skin cancer later in life. During hot weather, babies can become dehydrated.

To protect your baby:

- ▶ Limit time in the sun especially between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.
- ▶ Cover your baby in loose clothing and make sure your baby is wearing a hat with a wide brim.
- ▶ Use a stroller sunshade.
- ▶ Seek shaded play areas or use a sun umbrella. Wait until your baby is 6 months of age before using sunscreen on your baby.
- ▶ Breastfeed more often on hot days to ensure your baby has enough fluids.

Protect your baby from harmful chemicals.

Babies can be exposed to harmful chemicals such as fumes or dust from cleaning and renovation products and chemicals in plastics. Babies are at greater risk than adults because their immune system is not fully developed. Babies explore the world with their hands and mouths increasing their exposure.

There are ways that you can reduce risks from harmful chemicals:

- ▶ Vacuum or wet-mop once a week.
- ▶ Take your shoes off at the door.
- ▶ Minimize clutter and store toys in a closed container.
- ▶ Wash your hands often using regular soap and warm water. Antibacterial soaps are not recommended.
- ▶ Use non-toxic cleaning products.
- ▶ Keep your baby away from areas that are being renovated. Renovation dust often contains harmful substances such as lead, which is toxic to the developing brain.
- ▶ Choose less toxic paints, finishes, and glues. Look for products labeled VOC-free, zero-VOC, or low-VOC. Open the windows and use fans to bring in fresh air during and after use of these products.
- ▶ Avoid exposure to harmful plastics by avoiding bath toys, shower curtains, and other items that contain PVC or vinyl (a type of soft plastic). These items can contain harmful chemicals called phthalates, which were banned in children's toys in June 2011.
- ▶ Protect your child from second-hand and third-hand smoke. See the Smoking key messages for more information.

Protect your baby from insect bites.

Mosquitoes and ticks can carry disease. In some parts of Ontario, there is a risk of West Nile virus from infected mosquitoes and Lyme disease from infected ticks.

To help avoid insect bites you can:

- ▶ Dress your baby in socks and shoes or a sleeper covering the legs and feet. Choose light-coloured and long-sleeved clothing.
- ▶ Avoid being outside at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.
- ▶ Avoid places where mosquitoes breed and live (standing water).
- ▶ Clean up any standing water in your yard.
- ▶ Keep screens in good repair.
- ▶ Use a fine mesh net to cover your baby's stroller or playpen when outside. Wait until your baby is 6 months of age before using insect repellent on your baby.

Find out if you live or will visit an area with infected deer ticks. Learn how to protect your family.

Protect your baby from pets.

Pets can carry disease or cause injury to your baby.

To avoid risks to your baby from pets:

- ▶ Make sure your pet is healthy by having regular veterinary care for vaccinations and when your pet is ill.
- ▶ Supervise your pet or other animals when near your baby.
- ▶ Prevent your pet from licking your baby.
- ▶ Wash your hands after handling pet litter or droppings.
- ▶ Wash your baby's hands after direct contact with a pet.

Learn more about newborn safety and keeping your baby safe from injury.

You can find out more about newborn safety from the following resources.

- ▶ Your health care provider
- ▶ Your local public health unit 1-866-532-3161
- ▶ EarlyON - Ontario's Child and Family Centres 1-866-821-7770
www.ontario.ca/EarlyYears
- ▶ Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS)
 - ▶ Caring for Kids: Keep your baby safe
www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/keep_your_baby_safe
 - ▶ Caring for Kids: Never shake a baby
www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/never_shake_a_baby
- ▶ Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment (CPCHE)
<http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/>
- ▶ Parachute
 - ▶ Child Injury Prevention (Ages 0 – 6)
www.parachutecanada.org/child-injury-prevention
 - ▶ Prevent Child Injury
www.preventchildinjury.ca
- ▶ oMama
www.omama.com