

Backyard Safety

The home backyard is a place for everyone, children and adults. The area around the house may include a garage, sheds, a swimming pool, play equipment and toys, garden tools and pets.

The most common place for childhood injury is in and around the home. Many of these injuries occur in the backyard and garden.

Each year approximately 1,400 children present at the Emergency Department of Princess Margaret Hospital for injuries sustained in the home yard or garden.

The majority of these presentations are children in the 0-4 age group. Nearly half of all backyard injuries are from falls.



How can you make your backyard Kidsafe?

Step One: Look for dangers in the backyard. This fact sheet will help you become more aware of these hazards

Step Two: Decide what to do about the hazard or danger. What you do about it will depend on just how dangerous it is, how it can be changed and what kind of problem it is for your child.

Step Three: Make changes so that the hazard is no longer dangerous.

Age does matter

A backyard that is safe for a twelve year old can be very unsafe for a toddler. Most injuries happen to children under five. At this age children have little awareness of danger. They are very curious but they don't always realise the dangers.

Under fives have to be protected from their own curiosity by making the places that they play safe. Often they need to be supervised whilst they are playing.

Older children are far more likely to recognize the dangers around them but they still get injured. They want to explore, play sport, ride bikes and they try to do too much. They need to be given limits and safety guidelines.

Older children should not be expected to be responsible for looking after younger siblings. At the same time, older children need to be aware of what is dangerous for younger children. They need to be told:

- Make sure that the gate to a swimming pool is properly closed every time.
- Take away ladders from cubbies or tree houses so that younger children can't climb up
- Clear away toys and other equipment that are not in use.

A Safe Place to Play

A Kidsafe backyard is a place where there are plenty of child friendly things to do, but without major hazards.

Children need a safe place to play that is fenced off:

- From the driveway
- From the pool
- From any steps or stairs in the garden or around a veranda
- From animals that might harm them.

Fences should be well maintained and without gaps or sharp edges. Children also need an area that is open and clear of obstacles.

Play Equipment

Backyard play equipment should be sturdy, strong and well-maintained. It should also:

- Suit the age and size of the child. Young children should be supervised on play equipment.
- Have a suitable impact absorbing surface under and around play equipment.



- Be checked regularly for wear, tear and safety hazards.
- Have no sharp edges, pieces that can come loose, no openings or moving parts that can trap or injure children.
- Use sports equipment which suits their age and size, and wear appropriate protective gear such as helmets and knee pads
- Trampolines should have padding around the frame and over the springs. Teach children to jump in the centre of the mat and only allow one child on at a time (AS 4989:2010).
- Choose toys that are suitable for the child's age and size, including bikes. Clear away toys when they are not being used.

Motors off

Never leave motors of any kind switched on and unsupervised when children are around. That includes:

- Cars in the driveway or in the garage: Turn off and lock a car or vehicle; take the key out of the ignition; and always know where your children are around cars. Many children have been run over in their own driveway.
- Lawn mowers and other garden equipment
- Electrical equipment

Safe Storage



The everyday backyard has items such as chemicals, poisons, garden materials, tools and machinery which can be dangerous for young children. They must be locked away securely.

Safe storage means:

- A lockable garage or shed with high inaccessible storage areas
- All locks and catches should be child-resistant
- Ladders stored out of children's reach
- Swimming pools and spas must be fenced. They must have a self closing, self-latching gate.
- Everyday items such as weed killer, pesticides, kerosene, and pool chemicals are deadly to toddlers who put everything in their mouths.
- Keep poisons safe by ensuring they are stored both locked away and up high in their original containers.

Water Safety

- The best way to protect your child is to have isolation fencing around a pool or spa with a self latching and self closing gate.
- Always watch your child in and around water.
- Learn what to do in an emergency: basic first aid and resuscitation.
- Cover garden ponds with wire mesh that is strong enough to hold the weight of a young child and high enough above the surface of the water to keep their faces out of the water.
- Empty containers such as buckets and wading pools when not in use. A child can drown silently in as little as 5cm of water.



Dogs in the Backyard

Dogs can be wonderful pets however they are responsible for some serious injuries to young children. Often injuries are to the child's head and face. Young children can unintentionally upset a dog.

Always watch over children when around dogs and teach them how to safely interact with all animals.



Eating Outdoors

Outdoor eating often means barbeques, parties and social eating. Barbeques can be dangerous:

- Flammable liquids should never be used to light any fire.
- Always watch children around barbeques. It is easy for children to get burnt by the hot metal, flames or spitting oils and fats.
- If the barbeque uses gas, always turn off the gas and disconnect the bottle when not in use.
- Keep matches out of children's reach.

A tidy backyard

- Store away all tools, sports equipment, toys and machinery when they are not being used.
- Keep the backyard clear of general rubbish.
- Use non-slip surfaces for walkways and steps.

Safe in the Sun

When children spend time in the backyard they often spend time in the sun. Children need to be protected from the sun. Too much sun during childhood can cause skin cancer as they get older.

To stay safe in the sun:

- Stay out of the sun during the hottest times of the day, generally between 10am and 3pm.
- Have a good shade area in the backyard so that children can play out of the sun.
- Children need clothing that gives them protection from the sun. Broad-brimmed or legionnaire style hats and clothing that covers as much skin as possible. Cotton and lycra can have good sun protective properties.
- Use an SPF 30+ sunscreen on parts of the body that are exposed to the sun.



Work and play

Children get injured when adults are working in the backyard. So:

- Keep the toolbox out of reach
- Keep the workbench clear
- Keep caps and lids on all containers
- Keep children separate from the work activity.

A farm is a home but it is also a busy and dangerous workplace. It is important children on farms also have a safe backyard.

- A safe place to play especially for younger children is one that is next to the house and fenced off from water, farm animals and farm machinery.
- Supervise young children and always know where they are.

For more detail on any of the individual injury topics identified on this fact sheet, refer to the individual injury issue fact sheets available at www.kidsafewa.com.au

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