

Preventing Harmful Childhood Falls: A CHECKLIST



PUBLIC HEALTH

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york.ca/childhoodfalls

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York Region



Falling is a normal part of a child's development as they grow, gain new skills, and learn about the environment around them. While most falls do not result in serious injury, a fall is the most common cause of childhood injuries requiring medical attention.

- Most **infant** falls happen at home and are the result of falling from a raised surface such as a bed, couch, chair, change table, or down stairs
- Falls for **toddlers** usually occur at home and are commonly caused by slipping, tripping, and falling out of bed, down stairs, or from high places
- Playgrounds are the most common area for falls for **children between the ages of five and nine**

The majority of falls are predictable and preventable. Preventing falls is a combination of active supervision and creating a safe environment. Adults need to role model safe behavior, teach and reinforce home and playground safety rules, and help school age children to manage risk.

Use this fall prevention checklist to identify the potential fall risks at home and at play and make changes to help keep your child safe.

Supervision

- Actively supervise. **Watch, listen, and stay near your child**
- Never step away from your baby when they are on a raised surface, like on a change table or a bed
- When changing baby on a change table, keep at least one hand on your baby at all times
- Never leave your child in an infant seat or car seat on an elevated surface like a table top, counter or washing machine. Place the baby seat on the floor
- Closely supervise when visiting other homes and new environments
- For older children, keep watch while giving your child the chance to explore and develop

Using Infant and Child Equipment

- Use safety straps when your child is in a stroller, high chair, car seat, infant seat, or on a change table
- Make sure your crib, infant and child equipment, and home safety devices meet Canadian safety standards
- Consider adding a bedrail when the child is moved to a larger bed, if necessary
- Move the crib mattress to its lowest level when your baby begins to push up on their hands and knees
- Once a child is taller than 90cm (35"), close to age three and/or climbing out of the crib, consider moving them to a larger bed

Stairs

- Install safety gates at the top and bottom of all stairways; the top must be anchored to the wall, not pressure mounted
- Do not let children play on stairs
- Closely assist children as they learn to walk up and down stairs and teach them how to use hand rails



Keep Areas Clear

- Keep pathways, hallways, stairs and exits clear of objects, accessible and well-lit
- Put away toys when not in use
- Keep floors dry and free from spills
- Use non-slip mats with rubber backing

Windows and Doors

- Make sure all windows have safety devices or guards so they do not open more than 10 cm (4 inches). Window screens can come loose and do not prevent falls
- Use locks and guards on patio and balcony doors
- To prevent children from climbing to windows that open move furniture away
- Keep doors to stairwells, basements, bathrooms and balconies closed and latched
- Install child-resistant door knob covers for basement or exit doors



Bathroom

- Use a non-slip mat on the bathroom floor
- Use a non-slip bath mat in the bathtub
- Clean up wet floors promptly to avoid slipping

Footwear

- Toddlers or young children should wear socks with treads in the house to prevent slipping
- Children should wear footwear that fits properly and is slip-resistant, such as sneakers for outdoor play
- Keep shoe laces tied to prevent tripping

Furniture

- Keep favourite items on low shelves where they can reach them
- Do not let children less than six years of age sleep on the top bunk bed
- Keep children from climbing on the kitchen table, counter, or other furniture
- Keep children from jumping on furniture
- Move furniture out of the way when learning to walk
- Anchor top-heavy furniture like bookcases or dressers to the wall
- Secure televisions with television brackets or wall mount. Never place them on top of a high piece of furniture
- Electrical cords should be tucked away to prevent tripping

Outdoors at Home

- Watch your toddler closely when he or she is outside, especially on uneven or sloping ground, and hills
- Regularly check and maintain home play structures
- Home play structures need to be appropriate for the age and size of the child
- Do not allow play on home play structures during the winter months
- Backyard trampolines are not recommended

- Do not let children play on high porches, decks, or balconies
- During the winter months remove snow and ice from the driveway and walkways
- Take caution with pets around smaller children as their movements are unpredictable
- Make sure your child always wears a properly fitted helmet when on a toddler ride-on toy, tricycle, scooter or bike

Playgrounds

- Do a safety-check before children play
- Choose a playground with a deep, soft surface such as sand, pea gravel, mulch, or rubber chips
- Make sure the handrails are secure
- Use equipment designed for the child's age
- Stay close to your child as they are learning a new skill or climbing
- Encourage children to wait their turn, never push, and to slide down feet first and walk up the steps
- Do not use playground equipment in the winter



A fall often happens when a child has learned a new developmental skill, such as learning to roll, walk or ride a bike.

Plan ahead for your child's future skills and abilities, make changes to your home, and supervise how and where they play to keep them safe.



Additional Resources:

Parachute Canada [Parachutecanada.ca](https://www.parachutecanada.ca)

Health Canada (Product Safety) [hc-sc.gc.ca](https://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)