

# Safety Fact Sheet

## Baby Walkers



### What are baby walkers?

Baby walkers are a piece of equipment designed to support a baby or child who is not yet able to walk. A walker consists of a metal or plastic frame on wheels that holds a baby in a semi-standing position, with his or her feet touching the floor. Walkers are propelled by the movement of the baby.

Many parents believe that baby walkers are safe, allowing babies to enjoy mobility as a play alternative. However, baby walkers increase the mobility of the baby beyond their normal development and as such baby walkers are a cause of serious injury to children.



### How may children be injured when using baby walkers?

#### Burns

- The walker gives the baby access to dangerous areas in the home. Babies can be burned and scalded reaching for oven doors, stove tops, open fires, heaters, kettles, hot drinks and irons.

#### Delayed Development

- Studies show that baby walkers can influence a baby's development; sitting, walking and crawling may be delayed<sup>1</sup>.

#### Drowning

- A baby may gain access to and topple face down into water. Dangers include nappy buckets, toilets and pools.

#### Entrapment

- Babies may trap, and therefore cut, crush or amputate their fingers in doors.

#### Falls

- The baby walker can topple down stairs, causing serious head and facial injuries. The walker offers no protection to the baby. It adds weight and therefore momentum to the fall.

#### Poisoning

- A baby may gain access to poisonous substances such as medicines or cleaning products as a result of the increased access to areas within the home.

### How common are these injuries?

Baby walkers are a major cause of injury for children aged less than 12 months. Baby walkers accounted for 12% of nursery furniture injuries in 2004 at Westmead Children's Hospital.

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### Is there a Law or an Australian Standard for baby walkers?

The law (Fair Trading (General) Regulation 2002. Gazette No. 135) states that all baby walkers sold in NSW must comply with the Clauses 6.1, 6.4 and 9.3 of the US ASTM F977-00 Standard, which mandates that all baby walkers must have:

- A specified level of stability (Clause 6.1)
- A gripping mechanism to prevent falls down steps (Clause 6.4)
- A product warning label (Clause 9.3). The product warning label must state:



**'WARNING - Never leave child unattended.  
Always keep child in view while in walker.'**

Additional warnings must include the following:

- Use only on flat surfaces free of objects that could cause the walker to tip over
- To avoid burns, keep child away from hot liquids, ranges, radiators, space heaters, fireplaces etc.
- 'WARNING - STAIR HAZARD - Avoid serious injury or death. Block stairs/steps securely before using walker.'<sup>2</sup>

### Remember:

***The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Kaleidoscope recommends that you do not use a baby walker with your child.***

If you decide to use a baby walker, please consider the safety advice below:

- Purchase a baby walker that has a wide frame so that it cannot pass through doorways.
- Check the baby walker for small gaps that could trap fingers or toes.
- If you are purchasing a second hand baby walker, ensure that it complies with the US standard ASTM F977-00.
- Ensure that any metal or plastic parts are smooth and free of sharp edges and that the material is in good condition.
- Only use a baby walker when your child is able to sit up unaided.
- Ensure that the area in which your child uses the baby walker is flat with restricted access to stairs or areas with change in floor levels.
- Clear the floor of objects that may cause the baby walker to tip over.
- Check that the area has been made safe, ensuring no access to objects that might burn or poison your baby. Install child barriers or block access to the stove, oven, kettle, heaters, fires, chemicals or any other objects that may injure your child.
- Supervise your child in the baby walker at all times.
- The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Kaleidoscope recommends that you check for products that have been recalled ([www.recalls.gov.au](http://www.recalls.gov.au)) prior to buying or borrowing an item for use with your child.

<sup>1</sup> Garrett M, McElroy AM, Staines A. Locomotor milestones and baby walkers: cross sectional study. *BMJ* 2002; 324: 1494

<sup>2</sup> NSW Office of Fair Trading [http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/business/sellingsafeproducts/generalproducts\\_atoc.html](http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/business/sellingsafeproducts/generalproducts_atoc.html)

This fact sheet is for educational purposes only.

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**Kaleidoscope**  
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