

Safety Fact Sheet

Bath Cradles and Seats



What are bath cradles and seats?

Baby bath cradles are products designed for use when bathing babies. The cradles are placed upon the flat surface of the baby bath where their moulded shape helps to hold and support babies in a lying position, allowing the adult use of both hands for bathing the baby.

Baby bath seats are also bathing aids made to accommodate a later developmental stage and are used with babies aged six months or older. They are different to bath cradles in that they enable babies to be seated instead of being placed in a lying position and are used inside adult bath tubs instead of the baby baths. The bath seat consists of a seat which is anchored to the flat inside surface of the bath tub with suction cups. It has side, back and front struts and a semi-circular plastic ring at the top. A baby is seated upright with their back supported by the semi-circular tubing and their legs positioned through the square openings at the front of the bath seat.

Bath aides are utilised mainly during the first year of a baby's life until baby is able to sit independently without any assistance.



Baby Bath Cradle



Baby Bath Seat

How may children be injured when using bath cradles or seats?

Drowning

- Babies may slip down the bath cradle and into the water.
- Babies may start to lift up their upper body, resulting in the bath cradle tipping over and trapping them underneath.
- Babies may slide down the bath seat becoming entrapped in the leg openings and submerged in the bath water.
- Babies may lean too far forward in the bath seat, causing the suction cups to release. This may result in the bath seat tipping over with the baby still in the seat.
- Babies may fall/endoranger themselves as they attempt to roll over from a bath cradle or climb out of a bath seat. This is more likely to occur on smooth surfaces that are not slip resistant.

How common are these injuries?

Drowning is a leading cause of death among children less than five years of age living in New South Wales. Between 1996 and 2005, 30 children and young people died by drowning in a bathtub. Over 80% of these drownings were in children less than five years of age. ¹ The NSW Safety Task Force report identified bathtubs as the second most common location for drownings to occur, in children aged 12 months and

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under, accounting for almost 20% of all drownings in this age group².

Although the baby bath cradle and seat are promoted as bathing aids and not safety devices, they may provide parents/carers with a false sense of security. As a result, parents/carers may leave their baby's side to answer a call, pick up a forgotten bath item or to use the toilet. The lapsed time may be as little as a few seconds, which is all it takes for a baby to slip into or under water without a sound. Due to a baby's continual skill development and the slippery nature of the bath environment, he/she would not be able to reposition themselves onto the cradle or seat. Unfortunately, a baby is also unable to alert the parent/carer by splashing or crying when slipping under water. By offering a false sense of security, bath cradles and seats have contributed to drowning incidences, with the most commonly identified factor in these drownings being the lack of direct adult supervision².

Is there a Law or an Australian Standard for bath cradles and seats?

The law (*Fair Trading Act*, Section 31(1) Order) states that all bath supports for infants sold in NSW must be prescribed with a warning preceded and followed by a safety symbol such as that shown below:

"WARNING - Children have DROWNED while using bath aids. This is NOT a safety device. ALWAYS keep baby within arm's reach. NEVER leave baby in care of children"



Remember:

- Baby bath cradles and seats are bathing aids and are not to be relied upon as safety devices. Constantly watch your children while they are in the bath and be within arms reach so that you may quickly attend to them, if necessary.
- Babies can drown in as little as 5 cm of water. Hence, NEVER leave your baby unattended. If you must leave for any reason at all, be sure to take your baby with you.
- Never leave another child responsible for a baby in the bath, no matter how confident you are about the ability of the older child/sibling to watch the baby. Children are not capable of such responsibility.
- From a legal point of view, drowning deaths that occur in the bath, unfortunately, raise concerns about possible neglect or abuse. This has caused concerns in cases where an older, stronger sibling had shared the bath with the baby in question.
- Do not use a baby bath seat in a tub which does not have skid/slip resistance, as the suction cups may suddenly dislodge from slippery surfaces.
- Always leave the toilet seat down to prevent young children from accessing the water. You may use a safety clip to deter children from opening the lid in your absence.
- Never leave containers of water in the presence of young children, unless under direct adult supervision. Always empty containers after use (eg nappy buckets), even if the amount of water in the container is very small.
- The Children's Hospital at Westmead recommends that you check for products that have been recalled (www.recalls.gov.au) prior to buying or borrowing an item for use with your child.

¹. NSW Child Death Review Team. (2008) Trends in Child Deaths in New South Wales 1996-2005. New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People, Sydney.

². Williamson A, Irvine P, Sadural S. (2002) Analysis of drownings involving children aged five years and under in NSW. NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre, UNSW, Sydney.

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