

Safety Fact Sheet

Bunk Beds



What is a bunk bed?

A bunk bed is defined as a bed where the upper base of the bed, ie, timber slats, is between 800-1350mm above floor level. This can be two beds placed directly over each other, or a single bed with a storage area underneath. Bunk beds are often used in children's rooms because they take up less floor space.

How may a child be injured?

Falls and Entrapment

- Children may fall from the top bunk bed while playing, sleeping or climbing in and out of bed.
- Children can fall out of windows near the bunk bed.
- Children's heads, limbs and fingers may be trapped in gaps and crevices on the bed.
- Children can be accidentally hanged when their head or neck is caught up in clothing, gaps or other objects, ie, curtain cords, near or on the bed.

Struck by object

- If bunk beds are placed in rooms with ceiling fans, children may be struck by fan blades.
- Children may hit ceiling light fittings and fans or have access to unsafe electrical sources.
- If bunk beds are placed in rooms with low ceilings, children may strike their head on the ceiling while gaining access to the bed or playing on the bed.

How common are these injuries?

According to Monash University Accident Research Centre, approximately 2,100 children under the age of 15 years are treated each year in Australian hospital emergency rooms for bunk bed injuries. Of these, almost half occur to children between the ages of 5 and 9¹.

Is there a Law or an Australian Standard for bunk beds?

The law states that all bunk beds sold in NSW must comply with the Australian Standard AS/NZS 4220:2003, that mandates all bunk beds must have guard rails to the upper bunk, with the elimination of head entrapments in the bunk bed structure. In regard to width, gaps must measure less than 7mm, between 12 and 30mm, between 50 and 95mm or between 230 and 400mm. On top bunk beds measuring more than 80 cm above ground level, the following warning label must be displayed:

"WARNING – TOP BUNKS ARE VERY DANGEROUS FOR CHILDREN UNDER 9."

Remember:

The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Kaleidoscope recommends that you do not use bunk beds with children under the age of nine years. If space is an issue for your children's room, use trundle beds instead.

If you decide to use bunk beds, please consider the safety advice below:

- Do not allow children under the age of 9 years to occupy the top bunk.
- Never allow children to play on bunk beds.

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- Do not place bunk beds near windows, curtains or within 2 metres of a ceiling fan or light fitting.
- Regularly check that the bunk beds are free from wear and tear, particularly the ladder and guard rails.
- Ensure exposed edges and protruding parts are free of burring and sharp points.
- If you are building a bunk bed, ensure that it is built in accordance with the Australian Standard.
- Check for potential gaps that may entrap fingers, limbs and heads.
- Ensure that the mattress is the correct size for the bed.
- Ensure that the bed is free of protruding objects that may snag your child's clothing.

- 1 ACCC Bed Bunk Safety Requirements – July 2001, last accessed 9th October 2008, <http://www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/614074>
- 2 Bunk Bed Safety Assessment Checklist AS/NZs 4220:2003 – Australian Campsite and Outdoor Activity Provider Recreation Program, Australian Camps Association, updated December 2007, last accessed 9th October 2008, <http://www.auscamps.asn.au/accreditation/Res/BunkBed%20Checklist%20AS4220.2003.pdf>

This fact sheet is for educational purposes only.

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kids health
the children's hospital at Westmead
Child Health Promotion Unit

www.chw.edu.au



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