

Safety Fact Sheet

Playpens



What are playpens?

Playpens are small portable enclosures, consisting of bars or netting around the sides, where babies can play. They may be collapsible and are sometimes used for both play and sleep purposes.

How may children be injured in a playpen?

Falls

- Children may fall out of the playpen if they are able to use toys and other objects inside the playpen as a ladder to climb over one of the sides.
- Light-weight playpens may tip over if a child leans against one of the sides.

Entrapment

- Children may get their head caught in the space between vertical bars.
- Children may get their arms, legs, fingers or toes caught in gaps.
- Children may become entrapped if side rails collapse onto them.

Strangulation

- Suspended straps and elastic placed across the top of the playpen can pose a strangulation hazard.
- If the playpen is placed underneath a window, cord or blind strings close by can pose a strangulation hazard.
- Buttons on children's clothing can get caught on mesh coverings, if the holes are large.

Suffocation

If a playpen is also used as a portable cot, it poses the same suffocation hazards as a cot, as outlined below:

- Babies may become trapped between the mattress and playpen frame if the mattress does not fit snugly inside the playpen.
- Babies may suffocate if items such as toys, head bumpers and pillows placed in the playpen prevent them from breathing.
- Babies may suffocate under bed linen, if the bed is made up incorrectly. Loose bedclothes may be pulled up over a baby's face.

How common are these injuries?

While there are only a small number of recorded injuries related to playpen use, playpens have been involved in the deaths of a number of children overseas¹. The majority of these deaths however, were a result of suffocation due to soft bedding or inappropriate mattresses inside the playpen.

Is there a Law or an Australian Standard for playpens?

There are no laws or Australian Standards relating to playpens. Please keep in mind the safety reminders below when choosing a playpen.

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Remember:

- Choose a playpen that is stable and will not tip over if your child leans against it.
- Choose a playpen that has sides that are more than 500mm high.
- If the playpen has vertical bars, make sure the spacing between the bars is between 50mm and 85mm in width.
- Make sure locks and latches are well protected and lock properly into place.
- If using a wooden playpen, look out for staples that may become loose.
- Check the playpen regularly to ensure that the sides and floor are free of holes and tears.
- Place the playpen away from windows that have cord or blind strings hanging down.
- Do not place the playpen beneath a hanging picture or mirror that may fall on your child.
- Place the playpen away from heaters, lights, power points and electrical appliances to ensure that your child does not get burnt.
- Do not place large toys and objects against or inside the playpen that your child could use to climb up on.
- Do not leave your child unsupervised while in the playpen.
- If you are using a playpen as a portable cot, please refer to the “Portable Cots” fact sheet:

http://www.chw.edu.au/parents/kidshealth/safety_factsheets/pdf/portable_cots.pdf

¹ Rutherford, G. W. (2001) Playpens. *Consumer Product Safety Review* 6(1):1-2, 2001 Summer.