

Suffocation Prevention: Infants and Children

Suffocation Among Infants and Children ages 1-4, Virginia 2005-2009

- Suffocations are the leading cause of injury death among infants and young children (ages 0-4); resulting in 93 deaths over a five year period.
- 78% of these deaths occurred to infants less than 1 year of age.
- 79% of unintentional infant suffocation deaths occurred in a sleeping environment. Among children 1-4, the leading cause of unintentional suffocation was hanging/strangulation (41%).
- From 2005-2009, 121 infants and children were hospitalized due to a suffocation related injury. All but one hospitalization due to suffocation were unintentional in nature.
- 51% of unintentional suffocation hospitalizations were the result of the inhalation/ingestion of an object, while 44% were from food.

Prevention Tips

Suffocation is a preventable public health problem in Virginia. To prevent suffocations among infants and children:

- Place an infant on his/her back on a firm, tightly fit crib mattress in a crib with a JPMA (Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association) label indication that it meets national safety standards.
- Never allow your baby to sleep with other people or pets. Practice room-sharing instead of bed-sharing to prevent suffocation.
- Remove pillows, comforters, stuffed toys, crib bumpers/pads, and other soft products from the crib.
- Ensure that the crib has no missing, improperly placed, loose or broken hardware.
- Check the spacing between crib slats to ensure that the baby's body cannot slide through the opening.
- Crib slats should be no more than 2 and 3/8" apart (about the width of a soda can).
- Do not allow children under 3 to eat small, round or hard foods, including hot dogs, hard candy, nuts, grapes and popcorn.
- Always supervise young children while they are eating and keep small objects that are potential choking hazards out of their reach.
- Ensure that children play with age-appropriate toys according to safety labels and inspect old and new toys regularly for damage.
- Keep balloons out of the reach of children under 8 years old.
- Check the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission website (www.cpsc.gov) regularly to obtain information on recent toy recalls.
- Never put a crib, childbed or furniture near windows to prevent cord strangulation from window blinds and falls from windows.

Resources:

- Safe Kids USA
www.usa.safekids.org/
- Consumer Product Safety Commission:
Neighborhood Safety Network
www.cpsc.gov/nsn/nsn.html
- National Center for injury Prevention and Control (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/ncipc
- Injury and Violence Prevention Program
Virginia Health Department
www.vahealth.org/Injury



Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)*

Suffocation related injury deaths among infants in this report do not include Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). However, it is estimated that around 900 deaths attributed to SIDS each year may actually be caused by suffocation due to soft bedding.

Injury and Violence Prevention Program
Virginia Department of Health
1-800-732-8333
www.vahealth.org/injury