

Baby walker survey: Results and next steps

The Canadian Paediatric Surveillance Program (CPSP) sent a one-time survey on injuries associated with baby walkers to all CPSP participants to obtain data on the frequency and extent of this problem in Canada. This survey, commissioned by the Injury Section, Health Surveillance and Epidemiology Division, Health Canada, was designed to complement information obtained from its Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program (CHIRPP). Data from this hospital emergency-based surveillance program show that while serious baby walker injuries have decreased since a voluntary ban on their sale was introduced in 1989, they have not been eliminated. Baby walkers remain in use due to recent renewed sales in Canada, and circulation of old walkers within families and via garage sales.

The CPSP survey results indicated that 6.9% of more than 1100 respondents recalled treating one or more children younger than 18 months of age for injuries associated with baby walkers in the past year. Clearly, these injuries are both needless and preventable, so what can be done to curb future incidents? In the months ahead, Health Canada will review options and will work collaboratively with the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) Injury Prevention Committee, which is currently preparing a statement on baby walker safety, to consider the public health implications of the survey findings. In addition, information on baby walkers will be made available on the new CPS Web site for parents, "From our Point of View": www.caringforkids.cps.ca/Pointofview/pointofview.htm. Health Canada and the CPS gratefully acknowledge all CPSP participants who responded to this survey.

LEARNING POINTS

- Fifteen CHIRRP emergency departments treated 200 injuries/year in the early 1990s and 100/year in the late 1990s.
- 8.5% of those injuries required hospital admittance.
- A minimum of 129 children younger than 18 months of age were treated for baby walker-related injuries by survey participants in 2001.
- Serious injuries can result from the use of wheeled baby walkers, including burns, head and spinal injuries, and fractured arms and legs, especially when the baby walker tumbles down a stairway.
- Paediatricians should discourage the purchase or use of any wheeled baby walker and suggest stationary activity centres instead.
- Paediatricians should discuss with parents the dangers of buying or using recycled baby walkers.

The Canadian Paediatric Surveillance Program (CPSP) is a joint project of the Canadian Paediatric Society and Health Canada's Centre for Infectious Disease Prevention and Control that undertakes the surveillance of rare diseases and conditions in children. For more information visit www.cps.ca/english/cpsp or www.cps.ca/francais/pcsp.