

MEDIA RELEASE

Health Experts warn, “Remain extra vigilant with your kids during isolation”

Emergency departments (ED) across Sydney Children’s Hospitals Network (the Network) have seen a 63% increase in injuries particularly from bicycles and scooters since the implementation of social distancing measures.

During the first month of lockdown, 140 children presented to The Children’s Hospital at Westmead (CHW) and to Sydney Children’s Hospital, Randwick (SCH) with bicycle and scooter related injuries compared to 86 children during the same time last year. These alarming numbers have prompted health experts to warn parents and carers to remain extra vigilant with their kids during this isolation period.

Dr Soundappan Soundappan, Trauma Surgeon at CHW said social isolation has encouraged families to be more physically active in and around the home, but it is important that the correct safety precautions are followed to keep children safe.

“The high increase in bikes and scooter accidents is worrying but our message to parents is simple. Please ensure your children are wearing helmets, even when riding around the backyard or driveway. These necessary precautions can prevent serious head injuries and even save a life,” Dr Soundappan said.

Wearing a helmet has been shown to reduce the risk of a head injury by between 60-90%.

“People often think speed is the main cause for severe head injuries but significant impact can also occur from a stationary fall onto a hard surface, like a driveway or pathway which is why parents should always ensure their children are wearing helmets, regardless of where they are riding,” Dr Soundappan said.

The four simple bike, scooter and skateboard safety rules are:

1. Wear a helmet
2. Wear protective clothing
3. Ensure children are able to build up bike riding skills off the road
4. Ensure children are supervised while riding.

Dr Susan Adams, Trauma Surgeon at SCH explains parents should be aware of other dangers inside the home as well, with common household items posing a real risk to inquisitive children if parents are distracted with other tasks.

“It is understandable that accidents will occur in the home, particularly with the added pressures of working from home but by being aware of the potential hazards, you can put measures in place to protect your family.”

“Large furniture items such as chests of drawers, televisions and bookcases can crush if they tip on top of children. Exercise equipment is another potential safety hazard to be aware of with heavy items causing severe injury and we’ve seen serious friction burns occur when little fingers get caught in treadmills. Windows and balconies are a falls risk to children, so make sure windows cannot be opened more than 12.5cm and move furniture away from windows and balcony edges to prevent climbing,” Dr Adams said.

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This advice also extends to button batteries. Parents are encouraged to take special note of battery operated toys and household objects including remotes, torches and kitchen scales, button batteries which can cause pose a serious risk for children if the button battery is swallowed.

"Swallowing any button battery, old or new, can cause life-threatening injuries and even death, especially if it becomes stuck in the oesophagus," Dr Soundappan said.

"If your child does swallow a button battery, it is a medical emergency, which is why it is crucial these button batteries cannot be easily accessed by children. If your child does swallow a button battery, call the Poisons Information Centre immediately on 13 11 26 and take your child to the closest emergency department."

The Network and EDs across the state are prepared and ready for any child who needs emergency care and in the event of an accident, it is important that parents know that all EDs are safe to visit, despite the current COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our hospitals are safe places with our experts ready to care for children and their families when they need us the most. So please, if you have a medical emergency, don't delay. Visit when you need us," Dr Soundappan said.

Other safety messages:

- Children should always be supervised.
- Make sure windows cannot be opened more than 12.5cm, even if a fly screen is present.
- All windows which are 2m above ground level should have window locks/latches fitted to stop them opening more than 12.5cm
- Beds and other furniture should be kept away from windows, so that children cannot climb up on top.
- Top heavy or unstable furniture should be secured to the wall to prevent them from tipping.
- All furniture, pot plants and other climbable objects should be kept away from the edge of balconies.
- Be aware of furniture that is light enough for children to drag to the balcony edge.
- If your child does swallow a button battery, call the NSW Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26) immediately who will direct you to the Emergency Department best able to treat your child. Do not try to make your child vomit and do not let your child drink or eat until you have received medical advice.
- Keeping children and their families safe is the Network's priority. Our hospitals are safe places with experts ready to care for your kids when you need us most. Don't delay, visit when you need us.

Spokespeople available:

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