

Relatives Raising Children

Health and Safety Tips for Younger Children



Raising grandchildren can be challenging and rewarding. Keeping children healthy and safe can be simple, but it does take thought and preparation.

Much of what you know about the health and safety of younger children is true, but there have been some changes in recommendations since your own children were young. Here are some suggestions that may help.

Health Tips

Visit a health care professional regularly. Your child may already have a health care professional. If not, find a family doctor or pediatrician you can trust. To receive medical care for your grandchild, you will need a medical consent form. A medical consent allows you to make medical decisions for your grandchild in the absence of his parents. To obtain information about a medical consent form, check with your county Department of Community Based Services (DCBS) or your regional Area Agency on Aging and Independent Living.

Prevent childhood obesity. Children and adolescents today are almost three times more likely to be overweight than they were in 1980. According to the Cen-

ters for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 17 percent (or 12.5 million) of children and adolescents 2-19 years old are moderately or severely overweight. Being overweight as a child often leads to adult obesity—and the health issues that go along with it. The good news is that eating a healthy diet and staying active can be fun. They are the two most important things you can do to help your child develop healthy lifelong habits.

Take care of teeth. Dental care should begin even before your child has teeth. To protect new teeth, do not put your grandchild to sleep with a bottle. Wipe a baby's gums and new teeth daily with clean gauze or a damp washcloth. When she is able to handle a toothbrush, teach her to brush her teeth and follow up with her until she is comfortable brushing on her own. Take her to visit a dentist as soon as she has several teeth. She will begin to trust the dentist as someone who helps her, not hurts her. You will need a medical consent form for dental care for your child.

Teach frequent hand washing. Hand washing is the most important way to prevent the spread of germs. Show your child how to wash hands and wash your own as well with warm soap and water. Wash often, especially before eating and after using the toilet. To be sure your child washes her hands long enough to get rid of germs, try teaching her to sing the happy birthday song twice.

Keep household surfaces clean. Wiping surfaces with non-toxic cleaners is another way to kill germs and keep your child healthy. Use a ratio of a quarter-cup bleach to 1 gallon of cool water or 1 tablespoon of bleach to 1 quart of water. Keep bleach solution out of direct light and out of the reach of children. Mix a new solution each day. Common things that are important to keep clean are:

- Table tops
- Kitchen counters
- High chairs
- Floors
- Toys
- Cell phones
- Car keys
- Car-seat hand rests
- Door knobs

Do not smoke around your child. There is no question that smoking is bad for everyone's health. Second-hand smoke is harmful for children. It can cause health problems such as asthma,



bronchitis, pneumonia and middle ear infections. Sitting by an open window, smoking only in certain rooms, or cracking a car window when smoking are *not* suitable ways to protect your grandchild from the dangers of secondhand smoke because the smoke lingers. The best ways to prevent your grandchild from smoking are to set a good example by not smoking yourself and to talk with her about the dangers of smoking.

Immunize your child against diseases. Immunizations (also called vaccinations) are an important way to keep your grandchild healthy. Immunizations are required for children to attend daycare and public school. Vaccines are provided by your grandchild's doctor and by county health departments. If you do not know what vaccines your grandchild has received, his health care provider or the last school attended may have those records. Ken-

tucky law allows exemptions for immunizations based on religious objections. Check with your county or district public health department for the most recent immunization schedule, or go to <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm5851-Immunization.pdf>. Obtain a medical consent form before having your child vaccinated (refer to the first section of this publication, "Visit a health care professional regularly"). Below is a reminder of what the vaccine initials stand for:

DTaP:	Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis
OPV:	Oral poliovirus vaccine
IPV:	Inactive poliovirus vaccine
HepA:	Hepatitis A
HepB:	Hepatitis B
Hib:	Haemophilus influenzae type b
MCV	Meningococcal Conjugate Vaccine
MMR:	Measles, mumps, rubella (German measles)
TT:	Tetanus toxoid
Varicella:	Chicken Pox

Keeping Your Child Safe

Bullying

Bullying is the repeated physical and emotional mistreatment of a weaker child by a more powerful child. Bullying is known to cause long-lasting physical and emotional pain for both the bully and victim. Physical bullies are usually but not always boys. Girls usually bully with verbal insults. Recently, cyber-bullying, including online threats and intimidation, has become a new way children pick on each other. Children may need adult help to manage this problem.

- Ask your child if he has ideas about how to solve his problem. Help him put his ideas to work. Do not suggest that he fight back.
- Suggest that he avoid the child who is bullying. Sometimes the bully stops when no attention is paid to the action.
- If the bullying is happening at school, talk to school authorities about the situation. Learn about school policy on bullies, and ask for resources that may help you deal with it at home. Ask school officials to work with you to find a solution.

- Help your child develop healthy friendships with other children. Invite them over to your house to play and get to know their parents.

Child Safety Seats

It is critical that children ride safely in car seats, booster seats, or seat belts, depending on their age and size. In 2007, in the United States, 6,532 traffic fatalities involved children ages 14 and younger. In Kentucky and in many other states, laws are now in place to keep babies and children safe while moving in a vehicle. Go to your local



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fire station or to the nearest child care resource and referral agency to have your child's safety seat checked. Kentucky laws require that:

- Children less than 40 inches tall must be in a child or infant seat.
- Children younger than seven years old and between 40-50 inches tall must be in a booster seat.
- Children over seven years old and over 50 inches tall must be in a seat belt.

Other car safety recommendations include:

- Children 12 years old and under should always ride in the back seat.
- Babies (until one year old) and at least 20 pounds should be in a rear-facing child safety seat.
- Toddlers (more than one year old) and 20 to 40 pounds can be in a forward-facing child safety seat.
- The seat should not move or wiggle more than an inch side-to-side and back and forth when pulling along the belt path.
- Straps should fit snugly; no more than one finger should be between the child's collar bone and the strap.
- Read the manufacturer's instructions and your car's manual for proper installation of your child safety seat.



Toddlers (more than one year old) and 20 to 40 pounds can be in a forward-facing child safety seat.

Purchasing a used car safety seat is not recommended. Never buy a used car seat at a garage sale or thrift shop. However, if you have a used child safety seat, check for the following before putting your child into it.

- Make sure it has a sticker from the manufacturer with model, date of manufacture, and instructions. Do not purchase or use if the date is five years old or more.

- Check for hairline cracks or loose parts. If so, do not use the car seat.
- Ensure all parts are present and in working order.
- Check to see if the seat has been in a crash or has been part of a recall. If it has, do not purchase or use it.
- Call the manufacturer if you have questions about the safety of your seat.

Go to http://www.carseat.org/Brochures_etc/28_Keep.pdf or <http://www.healthy-children.org/English/safety-prevention/on-the-go/Pages/default.aspx> for more information.

Sleep Position

Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) includes Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other reasons for unexplained infant death. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, SUID/SIDS is linked to stomach sleeping. Babies should be placed on their backs to sleep. There should be no soft surfaces such as fluffy pillows, stuffed toys, or thick blankets in cribs. Babies could suffocate by coming into contact with such items. Make sure that the temperature in the room is comfortable for you, not so warm that the baby feels sweaty.

Cribs need to meet current guidelines to ensure a baby's safety. Many older cribs DO NOT meet these current guidelines. While purchasing a crib in a garage sale or at a secondhand store might be a good bargain, such a bargain is not worth your grandchild's safety.

Current crib guidelines include:

- Slats no wider than $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches apart.
- Tight fitting, firm mattresses. Check to be sure you can't fit more than two fingers between the mattress and the crib frame.

Hand to Mouth

Young children love exploring things with their mouths. However, they don't always know the difference between food and something that could harm them.

- Remove cleaning products from under the sink or low cabinets and place them in a locked cabinet out of your grandchild's reach.
- Keep all household plants out of the reach of children. Some are poisonous.
- Throw away old prescription drugs. Make sure all medications, including over the counter drugs, are kept in their original containers with child-proof caps. Store all medications away from a child's reach.
- Keep purses and handbags out of reach of children. They may contain hand sanitizers, small mints, and sharp objects that are harmful to children.



- Write the emergency number for your local poison control center near your phone.

Childproofing your Home

Children love to explore. Unfortunately, a lot of what they find to play with could be harmful for them. One of the best ways to inspect your home is to see it from a child's eye level.

- Put safety gates at the top and bottom of stairs to keep infants and toddlers from falling down the steps. Install safety gates when your child starts crawling. Place gates at the top of stairs, at the bottom of stairs, and in doors to rooms that are off limits to the child.
- Keep cords on curtains and blinds well out of reach of young children. Children can get caught in the cord and strangle.
- Remove sharp decorative objects. Be mindful of sharp edges on tables. Cover them if at all possible.
- Remove or secure decorative items, furniture, and appliances, such as televisions, bookcases and chests of drawers that could easily tip over.
- Use non-slip rug pads under scatter rugs to help prevent slipping. Better yet, get rid of the scatter rugs while your child is young.

- Cover electrical outlets with safety plugs. Place extension cords out of your grandchild's reach and check them for exposed wires and frayed places.
- Remove tablecloths to prevent your grandchild from pulling on the cloth.
- Place cat litter in a room your grandchild cannot enter.
- Do not leave any containers of water or cleaning solution around for a child to fall into.

Fireproofing your Home

- Keep a fire extinguisher handy in your kitchen and know how to use it properly.
- Keep matches, lighters, and candles out of reach of your grandchild.
- Cover fireplaces with screens.
- Install smoke detectors on every floor of your home. Also consider carbon monoxide detectors. Check them monthly.
- Make a fire evacuation plan. Part of a simple plan might include the quickest way to get out of the child's bedroom and where to meet outside the house in case of a fire.

Bathroom Safety

- Set your water heater no hotter than 110 degrees.
- Never leave an infant or toddler alone in the tub—not even for a second. Drowning can occur quickly and in just a small amount of water.
- Use non-skid decals in the bathtub.
- Unplug curling irons, shavers, and blow dryers when they are not in use.
- Close the toilet lid when not in use.

Play Areas

- Check your grandchild's toys for small parts and sharp edges. A good rule of thumb is that the toys or pieces of toys should be too big to fit through a toilet paper tube, to prevent choking.
- Toy boxes or chests should not have lids on them or the lids should be lightweight, to prevent children from being trapped inside.
- Playground equipment needs to be properly installed and set firmly into the ground. Check it for jagged edges and splinters every month.
- If you have a swimming pool, make sure it is secure (for example, it should have a tall, non-climbable fence with a self-locking gate). Never let a young child near the water alone—not even for a second.

Conclusion

Raising grandchildren can be challenging and rewarding. Keeping children healthy and safe can be simple, but it does take thought and preparation. Contact your county Extension office for more helpful resources.

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