

A Parent's Guide to

Baby's First Year



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**

www.kidsafewa.com.au

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Welcome to your new baby

As a new parent, we know that the first 12 months of your baby's life can be a whirlwind of new information. One of the most important things to think about is safety and how to protect your baby from injuries at home, on the road and at play.

Injuries are the leading cause of death and hospitalisation in Australian children. While children at all ages are at risk of injuries, babies and toddlers are particularly vulnerable in their first year of life. Most injuries that happen to children under 12 months old occur in the home, where they are likely to spend most of their time.

The good news is that there are lots of ways you can watch out for your baby and reduce the risk of injuries. This guide provides a range of information on common injuries that can happen to babies and toddlers, and simple safety tips to help you provide a safe environment for your baby's first 12 months.



Key steps to preventing injuries

To create a safe environment for your new baby and to reduce the risk of injuries, we recommend following these three key steps:

1. **Spot the hazards**

Get down on your hands and knees to look at your surroundings from your baby's perspective.

2. **Decide how to deal with the hazard**

Make a decision on how to best protect your baby from the hazard. This guide will provide you with tips to deal with a range of different hazards, including:

- Removing the hazard.
- Guarding against the hazard, if you are unable to remove it
- Supervising your baby closely around hazards and keeping them within arm's reach.

3. **Make the Change**

Injuries often happen when we least expect it, so it's important to act immediately once a hazard has been identified.

It's always going to be hard to keep your baby's environment 100% safe, so it's important to be prepared if an injury or accident does happen. It's a good idea to complete a first aid course and to have emergency contact numbers on hand.



Stages of baby's development

From birth, babies are constantly learning new skills as they start to explore the world. In their first year, babies will quickly become mobile, keeping you on your toes.

As babies become mobile, they have access to a greater range of potential hazards and don't have the skills or ability to navigate their world safely.

Understanding your baby's development as they grow will give you lots of enjoyment and will help you to provide a safe environment for them.

Each baby develops at their own pace, usually through similar stages.

Birth to 6 months

- Restricted mobility
- Wriggling and rolling
- Sucking and mouthing objects
- Reaching for objects
- Motor excitement
- Attempts to sit up and crawl

6 months to 1 year

- More mobile
- Increased curiosity – looking for things
- Putting things into mouth
- Reaching and grabbing objects
- Attempts to crawl and take steps
- Imitate parent's actions



Falls

Falls are a natural part of growing up – all babies will fall as they learn to stand, walk, climb and play, but falls are also the leading cause of injuries for Australian children.

Some babies may escape a fall with only minor cuts, bumps and bruises, but others are far more serious and include head injuries and broken bones¹.

Safety steps to prevent falls:

- Never leave babies unattended on raised surfaces like change tables, beds, couches, or furniture (even if they have never shown signs of rolling).
- Have everything you need close by when changing baby. Always use the safety strap if available and keep one hand on baby at all times.
- Always use the harness provided in high chairs, prams and strollers.
- Use corner protectors on benches, coffee tables and any other sharp corners.
- Use gates and barriers to restrict access to stairs until your toddler is old enough to teach them how to navigate stairs safely.
- When teaching toddlers how to climb safely, teach them to crawl down steps or stairs backwards.
- Keep objects and furniture that children can climb on away from windows.
- Keep entrances to balconies locked to restrict access by children. Always supervise children on balconies and make sure they cannot climb barriers.
- Avoid the use of baby walkers – these can increase your baby's risk of falls, enable them to access unsafe objects or areas, and can impact them learning how to walk if they are used for long periods of time.



1. Kidsafe Victoria. Baby Safety Guide. Available from www.kidsafevic.com.au/new-parent-hub/baby-safety-guide/

Poisoning

Every year, hundreds of children need medical treatment for poisoning from products commonly found around the home. Babies and toddlers are most at risk of poisoning as they love to taste and eat everything as a way of exploring the world around them.

As babies become more mobile, they are more likely to be able to access different items around the house, so it's important to know what items are potentially poisonous and know how to store them safely.

Safety steps to prevent poisoning:

- Always keep potentially poisonous items out of baby's reach.
- Store poisons in a locked cupboard preferably 1.5m above the ground.
- Use child-resistant locks on cupboards and cabinets if you cannot store poisons up high.
- Keep all cleaning products, chemicals and medications in their original containers and avoid storing these with food items to avoid confusion.
- Return all poisons to their safe storage area immediately after purchase or use. If you are using household products when the doorbell rings take the product with you.
- Dispose of any unwanted or unused medications. Contact your local pharmacy for advice.
- Place handbags out of reach, including visitor's handbags' as they may contain medications or other poisonous products.
- Read the label, dosage and instructions carefully before giving medications.
- Purchase products in child resistant containers and make sure the lids are on properly after use. Remember that child resistant is **NOT** child proof – many children can open child resistant containers.



Poisoning

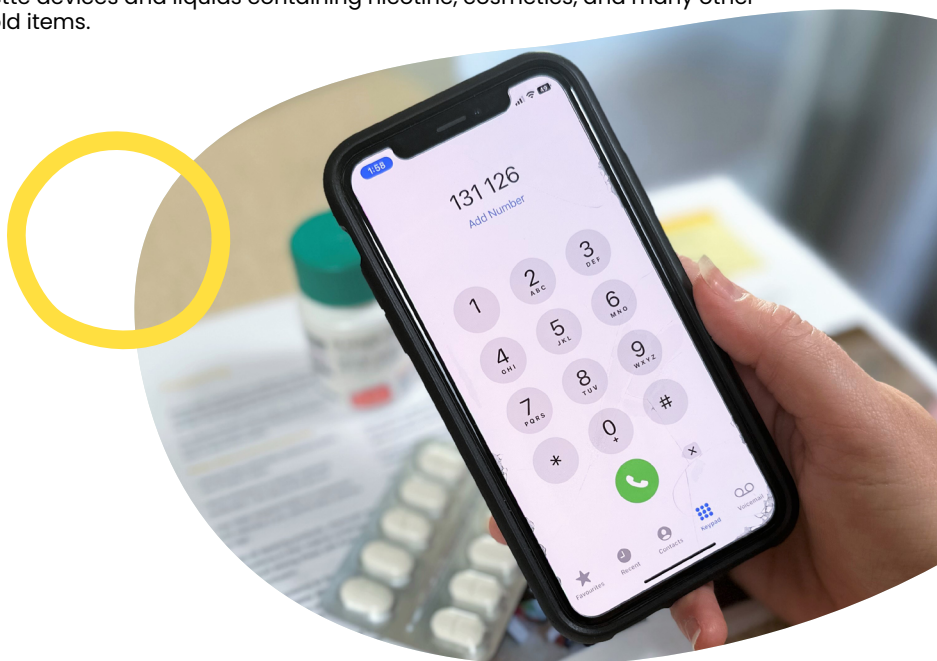
TOP TIP: First Aid for Poisoning

If your baby is not breathing, becomes limp or unconscious, call 000.

- If you think your baby may have swallowed something poisonous, take the container and your baby with you to call the **Poisons Information Centre: 13 11 26**
- Help is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day Australia wide. They will give you expert advice and tell you exactly what to do².

Common causes of poisoning:

Medications (over the counter and prescription), cleaning products, dishwashing powder, hand sanitiser, essential oils, fertilisers, weed killers, alcohol, cigarettes, e-cigarette devices and liquids containing nicotine, cosmetics, and many other household items.



2. St John Ambulance Australia 2022. First Aid for Poisons Fact Sheet. Available from www.stjohnwa.com.au

Burns and scalds

Burns and scalds are a common cause of childhood injury, with children under 5 being most at risk. Babies' skin is thinner and more sensitive than an adult's which is why it can burn more quickly and severely.

Babies and toddlers can be burnt or scalded very quickly, and this often happens when an adult is present, so it's important to be alert.

Safety steps to prevent burns and scalds:

General

- Install a guard around fires and heaters and supervise your baby at all times.
- Always supervise your baby around campfires, fire pits and BBQs.
- Keep hot items such as irons, hair straighteners and curlers out of reach. Put them up high to cool after use.
- Install smoke alarms and test them regularly. Change the battery once every year on the 1st April. Check with your local fire authority for recommendation on placement.

Bedroom

- Dress your baby in low fire risk clothing that is close fitting and made of less flammable material. Be aware that cotton is highly flammable.
- Make sure your baby's nightwear complies with Australian Standards and is labelled 'low fire risk'.
- Never use a hot water bottle in your baby's sleeping area.



Burns and scalds

Top Tip: First Aid for Burns and Scalds

If your baby is not breathing, becomes limp or unconscious, call 000.

If your baby suffers a burn or scald:

- **REMOVE** any clothing, nappies or jewellery, unless stuck to the skin.
- **COOL** the burn immediately under cool running water for 20 minutes.
- **COVER** the burn with a clean dressing.
- **SEEK** medical attention if the burn is on the face, hands, lap or feet, is bigger than a 20-cent piece or is blistered³.

Kitchen

- Never drink hot tea or coffee while holding your baby. Hot drinks are a common cause of scalds when they are accidentally spilt or knocked over.
- Keep hot food and drinks out of reach, especially as your baby becomes more mobile and attempts to reach for items.
- When bottle feeding, always check the milk temperature before giving it to your baby. Microwaves heat milk unevenly, so always shake the bottle to mix the contents.
- When introducing solids to your baby, ensure their food has cooled down enough for them to eat.
- Always use the back elements on a stove first and turn handles to the back to prevent small hands from reaching them.

Bathroom

- Always check the bath water temperature before bathing your baby. Bath water should be no more than 38°C.
- Always run the cold water first and last when filling up a bath and never leave a running bath unattended.
- Set your bathroom hot water delivery temperature to a maximum of 50°C. Ask your plumber for advice.
- Always supervise your baby in the bath to ensure they don't turn on the hot water tap.

3. National Burns Awareness Month 2019. Available from www.kidsafe.com.au/national-burns-awareness-month





Choking

As babies start to explore and put things into their mouths, it is important to be aware of potential choking hazards in their environment. Any item smaller than a 20-cent coin can pose a choking hazard for a baby.

Food is a common cause of choking for babies and toddlers as they have small airways and their reflexes are not yet fully developed. Be aware of choking hazards as you start to introduce solids to your baby.

Safety steps to prevent choking:

Around the home

- Keep items smaller than a 20-cent coin out of sight and reach of your baby.
- Keep items containing button batteries and magnets out of reach.
- Check for loose polystyrene beads in bean bags that can be inhaled.
- Buy toys that are suitable for your child's age by following the labels. Toys that can break easily and have parts that can come loose should be avoided.
- Keep older children's toys away from young children. This may mean separate play areas for children of different ages.
- Check all toys regularly for wear and broken parts which could come loose.

Feeding your baby

- Ensure your baby is sitting down when they are eating and always supervise them.
- Avoid giving hard food to your baby – food such as raw carrots, celery sticks and apples can be grated, par-boiled or mashed to reduce the risk of choking.
- Do not give popcorn, nuts, whole grapes, hard lollies, corn chips or other similar foods to your baby.
- If your baby is distressed or upset, do not force them to eat as this may increase their risk of choking.



Choking

Top Tip: First Aid for Choking

If your baby is choking and becomes blue, limp or unconscious, call 000.

- Place the baby with their head downwards on your forearm, supporting the head and shoulders on your hand, and opening their mouth with your fingers.
- Give up to 5 sharp blows to their back with the heel of one hand, checking if the blockage has been removed after each blow.
- If the blockage has not been removed, place the baby on their back on a firm surface.
- Place 2 fingers on the baby's chest and give up to 5 chest thrusts, checking if the blockage has been removed after each thrust.
- Alternate between 5 back blows and 5 chest thrusts until the object clears or the ambulance arrives⁴.



4. St John Ambulance Australia 2022. Choking First Aid Fact Sheet. Available from www.stjohnwa.com.au

Suffocation

Suffocation can happen to a baby when their supply of oxygen is blocked, which can be caused by an item blocking their airway or covering their mouth and nose.

There are many household items that can pose a potential suffocation hazard for babies. These items can include plastic bags, cling wrap, pillows, bean bags, balloons, bedding and soft mattresses.

Safety steps to prevent suffocation:

Plastics

- Always store plastic bags, plastic wrap and dry-cleaning bags out of reach of your baby. Tie a knot in them before storing or throwing them away.
- Always remove plastic covers on cots and bassinet mattresses before use.
- Always keep balloons, particularly uninflated balloons out of reach of your baby. Loose plastic from popped balloons may block your baby's airway if inhaled.

Sleeping

- Always remove accessories such as bibs and headbands before putting your baby down to sleep.
- Don't use pillows or bumper pads in your baby's cot as these can be a suffocation risk. These are unnecessary items for babies under 2 years of age.
- Choose a firm mattress for your baby's cot. Using soft mattresses, bean bags, and water beds can increase your baby's risk of suffocation.



Suffocation

Baby Slings and Carriers

While baby slings and carriers are a comfortable and convenient way to carry your baby, they can be dangerous if they are not used correctly. Babies can be at risk of suffocation if positioned incorrectly as they don't have the ability to move their head or neck on their own⁵.

- Choose a sling or carrier that is the right size for your baby.
- Ensure your baby's chin is always up and away from their body – your baby should not be curled so their chin is positioned onto their chest.
- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for use.
- Ensure you can always see your baby's face and that their face is not covered by the sling material or your clothing.



⁵. Red Nose 2021. Slings and Baby Carriers. Available from www.rednose.org.au

Strangulation



Many items around our homes can pose a strangulation risk for babies as they become more mobile. Loose strings such as curtain and blind cords, clothing and jewellery can pose a strangulation risk if a child is caught or tangled in them.

Safety steps to prevent strangulation:

Clothing and jewellery

- Choose clothing without ties or ribbons and avoid crocheted jackets that may pull tight around your baby's neck.
- Avoid necklaces and other jewellery including amber beads that can pull around your baby's neck. If you are going to use these items, remove them before putting your baby down to sleep.
- Avoid attaching chains, ribbons, strings or cords to dummies. If you are using these items, make sure the chain is no longer than 22cm.

Curtains and blind cords

- Secure loose or looped curtain and blind cords at least 1600mm above floor level, out of reach of babies.
- Depending on the types of curtains/blinds in your home, there are kits and devices that can help you secure these.
- Keep furniture like cots, beds, high-chairs, couches, chairs and tables away from windows and blind or curtain cords.



Button batteries

Button batteries are powerful coin-shaped batteries that are found in several household items. If ingested by a small child, button batteries can become stuck in their throat and start to burn through their oesophagus in less than 2 hours, causing severe life-threatening injuries or death.

Babies and toddlers are most at risk of button battery-related injuries as they become more mobile and start to put things into their mouths. Many parents are unaware of the dangers of button batteries, and the symptoms of swallowing a button battery may be similar to other illnesses.

Safety steps to prevent button battery injuries:

- Identify devices around your home that may contain button batteries. This can include toys that flash or sing, remote controls, hearing aids, calculators and singing greeting cards.
- Ensure battery compartments are secure, regardless of whether the device is intended for a child.
- Dispose of batteries safely at a battery recycling collection point. Contact your local council for locations.
- Place devices that contain button batteries out of reach and out of sight of babies.
- Share this information with other parents and carers, friends and family members.



Top Tip: Button Battery Ingestion

If your baby is not breathing, becomes limp or unconscious, call 000.

- If you think your baby may have swallowed a button battery, call the **Poisons Information Centre: 13 11 26**
- When at the hospital, let staff know that you suspect a button battery ingestion.

Electrical safety

Electricity is an essential part of our day to day lives, making it easy to become complacent when it comes to safety.

As babies become more mobile around the house, they can start to access items such as power points and appliance cords. Most electricity related injuries happen within the home and can be caused by damaged or worn cords and objects being inserted into power points.

Safety steps to prevent electrical injury:

- Use plug-in safety covers on unused power points to stop children from inserting objects into them.
- Use electrical safety switches installed by an electrician – these turn the power off when there is a fault.
- Unplug electrical appliances when not in use and store them out of the sight and reach of babies.
- Check appliances regularly and stop using an appliance immediately if it becomes faulty – ensure it is checked by a licensed electrical contractor before using it again.
- Electricity and water are a dangerous mix. Never touch an electrical appliance if it is wet and avoid using electrical appliances in areas like bathrooms that are near water.



Water safety

Drowning is the leading cause of unintentional death for children under 5 years of age. While babies and toddlers are naturally curious and attracted to water, they are at high risk of drowning and require constant supervision to keep them safe.

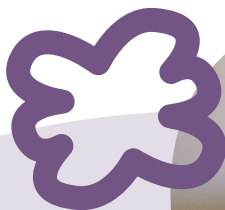
Keep Watch is a program run by Royal Life Saving Society WA that provides information to parents and carers on preventing drowning in children under 5. For more information on water safety visit www.royallifesavingwa.com.au.

Safety steps to prevent drownings:

- Actively supervise your baby in and around water. Always be within arm's reach of your baby.
- Never leave your baby alone in the bath – always take them with you if you have to leave the room.
- Never allow older children to supervise babies around water – supervision should always be from an adult.
- Learn how to perform CPR and update this regularly.
- Restrict your baby's access to water – always close the door to the bathroom and toilet and ensure pools and spas are properly fenced.
- Always empty buckets, coolers and pet water bowls when not in use.
- Familiarise your baby with water from a young age.

Swimming pools and spas

If you have a swimming pool or inflatable pool that holds more than 30cm of water, you need a barrier that isolates the pool from the house and the rest of the backyard. For further information on what is required, contact your council or local government.



Furniture tip-overs

Once your baby starts to crawl and walk, they are likely to start climbing and pulling on objects including household furniture. As babies lack awareness of surrounding hazards, this puts them at an increased risk of injury from TV and furniture tip-overs⁶.

As your baby becomes more mobile, it's important to look at the furniture around your home and put measures in place to prevent it from falling or being pulled down.

Safety steps to prevent furniture tip-overs:

- Secure any unstable furniture to the wall or floor and secure TVs to the cabinet or wall, using furniture brackets and/or anchors.
- Do not put heavy items on the top shelves of bookcases.
- Do not put tempting items such as toys on top of furniture that could encourage toddlers to climb up and reach them.
- Do not place unstable furniture near your baby's play area.
- Use locking devices on drawers to prevent toddlers from opening them and using them as steps.
- Purchase low set furniture or furniture with a sturdy, stable and broad base.
- Look for furniture that comes with safety information or equipment for anchoring.



6. Kidsafe Victoria. Baby Safety Guide. Available from www.kidsafevic.com.au/new-parent-hub/baby-safety-guide/

Safe sleeping

In their first 12 months, babies will spend a lot of their time sleeping, so it's important that they are always put down to sleep in a safe environment to reduce the risk of injury and sudden infant death.

The number of babies dying from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) in Australia has reduced significantly over the years as we understand more about safe sleeping practices.

Safe steps for creating a safe sleeping environment:

- Always place babies on their back to sleep – this will keep their airway clear, reduces the risk of suffocation and overheating.
- Keep baby's face and head uncovered – never use quilts, doonas, pillows, cot bumpers, lamb's wool, or soft teddies.
- Tuck bedding in securely so it is not loose, or use a baby sleeping bag that is the right size and weight for the season.
- Keep baby smoke free – smoking during pregnancy and around your baby increases the risk of sudden infant death.
- Put your baby down to sleep in their own cot or bassinet in the same room as you for the first 6-12 months.
- Use a cot that meets Australian Safety Standards with a firm and clean mattress.
- Never put your baby down to sleep on couches, bean bags, pillows, or other soft surfaces.
- Breastfeed your baby if you can – breastfeeding has shown to reduce the risk of sudden infant death.



Co-sleeping with your baby is not recommended

Co-sleeping with your baby can be dangerous in certain circumstances. If you do choose to co-sleep, it's important to know the risks and to take measures to do this safely. For more information on co-sleeping visit www.rednose.org.au.

Toy safety

Toys are a great way to entertain your baby as they start to become more aware of the world around them. Toys that are not suitable for your baby's age and stage of development can pose a hazard that could result in an injury, so it's important to choose toys carefully.

Safety steps to buying and using toys:

- Follow the age recommendation provided with toys – if a toy is marked unsuitable for children under 3 years, it may have choking or strangulation hazards.
- Look for labels that show compliance with the latest Australian Safety Standard.
- Look at the quality of the toy and for possible hazards including sharp edges, small parts or long strings, weak construction, or brittle plastic.
- Avoid using toys for babies that contain button batteries or small magnets.
- If using a toy box to store toys, make sure that a child cannot get trapped inside. Try to find one without a lid, or one with a lightweight, removable lid without a lock.
- Keep toys belonging to older kids separate and out of your baby's reach – small parts may be a choking hazard.
- Check toys regularly for any broken parts as they may deteriorate over time.

Purchasing toys and other baby products

As a new parent, the number of baby toys and other baby products on the market can be overwhelming. When buying these products, it's important to know what to look for to make sure they are safe and that they are a necessary item for your baby.

Keep Baby Safe is an online resource developed by the ACCC to provide parents and carers with up to date, reliable information on product safety including toys, soothing items, bath aids and nursery equipment.

To access Keep Baby Safe visit:

www.productsafety.gov.au/consumers/keep-baby-safe



Hot cars

Hot cars can be very dangerous for babies and small children. Every year in Australia, hundreds of children are rescued after being left unattended in a car⁷. Leaving your baby unattended in a car, even for a short period of time, can be fatal.

Even on a cool day the temperature in a parked car can be over 30°C hotter than the outside. This rise in temperature can happen very quickly, within the first five minutes of parking a car.

As a new parent there are times when you will be sleep deprived and adapting to new routines – while it may be hard to imagine, parents can forget their baby is in the back seat and unintentionally leave them unattended in the car.

Safety steps for keeping your baby safe in the car:

- Take your baby with you anytime you leave the car, even to run a quick errand.
- Plan to complete quick jobs when you don't have your baby with you.
- Look for service stations that provide 'pay at the pump' or app services that allow you to pay for fuel from your car.
- Always keep your keys on you when packing or unpacking the car – never leave them on the seat or in reach of older children.
- Always check the back seat of your car before leaving – leave something that you need such as your phone, handbag or wallet in the back seat.

Safety steps for travelling in hot weather:

- Dress your baby in clothing that is lightweight and light in colour.
- Avoid using the hood of a capsule car seat as this can decrease airflow around your baby's head. Instead, use a visor or sunshade to protect your baby from the sun.
- Cool your car down as much as possible before putting your baby in the car.
- Plan journeys for the cooler hours of the day when possible.



⁷ RAC 2022. Keep your keys on you. Available from www.rac.com.au

Child car restraints

A correctly fitted and used child car restraint can reduce the risk of serious injury or death in an accident. Babies and children are at significant risk of road injuries in Australia, so it is important to know how to transport them safely every time they are in the car.

Buckle up every child in a child car restraint on every trip and never hold your baby on your lap while travelling in the car.

Child car restraint legislation:

Children under 6 months of age

- From birth, babies must use a rearward facing child car restraint with an in-built harness.

Children 6 months to 4 years of age

- Children from 6 months to 4 years of age must use either a rearward facing child car restraint OR a forward-facing child car restraint with an inbuilt harness

Note: Keeping your baby in a rearward facing position until they reach the height marker on the seat offers the best protection in an accident.

Children 4 to 7 years of age

- Children from 4 to 7 years of age must use either a forward facing child car restraint **OR** a booster seat with a properly fastened and adjusted adult seatbelt.



Child car restraints

Choosing a child car restraint:

- Ensure the child car restraint meets the Australian Standards and is not purchased overseas.
- Choose a child car restraint that suits your child, car and individual needs.
- If using a second-hand child car restraint, make sure you know the history of the seat. It should be less than 10 years old and have never been involved in an accident.

Types of child car restraints:

- **Capsules** are a short-term option and are suitable for babies from birth until they meet the maximum height marker (usually between 6 and 12 months of age).
- **Convertible** child car restraints are suitable for babies from birth until at least 4 years of age. These are designed for your baby to sit rearward facing from birth to at least 6 months. Once your baby has reached the minimum height marker on the seat, they can use the restraint in the forward-facing position.

Installing and using a child car restraint:

- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully when installing.
- Always remove wraps, blankets and thick jackets before placing your baby into the restraint to ensure the harness fits closely around their body.
- Check the restraint regularly and make sure the seatbelt or ISOFIX system is firmly connected and that all slack is removed from the top tether strap after placing your baby in the restraint.



The best way to make sure your child car restraint is correctly installed is to use an authorised child car restraint fitting service. Contact Kidsafe WA for information on your nearest fitting service.

For more information on child car restraints, access the National Best Practice Guidelines at www.kidsafe.com.au.

For more information

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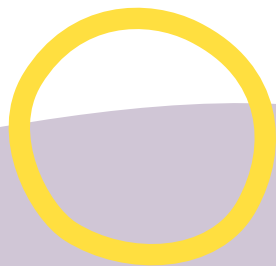
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Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia

Western Australia

www.kidsafewa.com.au