



Vigilance key with toddlers

Dr Paul Martiquet, Medical Health Officer

If there is one thing that toddlers all have in common, it is that they are establishing their independence and are very curious. They also have ‘super-powers’ in common: they’re quick and can disappear in a flash; danger is not in their vocabulary; and they can’t quite tell the difference between reality and fantasy. Add in a short attention span, easily distracted and you have a formula for danger.

For the toddler age group, injuries are the leading cause of death. This is partly due to the characteristics of toddlers, but also because they are just learning many of the balance and coordination skills we take for granted. A toddler’s head is also disproportionately large compared to an adults, throwing off their balance. They have not quite mastered the motor skills like walking, climbing and riding, making an accident more likely.

One of the few things we can do as parents, caregivers or older brothers and sisters is to be ever-vigilant around our toddlers. Expect the unexpected, and be quick—they are.

In the car, your toddler may resist the car seat, but it is a very important safety tool. Make sure you use it, and that it is correctly installed. You might try playing games with your child and find other ways to distract her from the ‘confinement’ she feels.

Water is of special concern as toddlers have been known to drown in bathtubs and wading pools. Never, ever leave a toddler alone in the water. Supervise at all times. Also consider signing up for toddler swimming lessons; many courses include parents in the water at the same time.

Playtime can also bring worry. Even if your child seems advanced, choose age-appropriate toys that won’t break off small pieces that can choke a child. Balloons are especially dangerous as it only takes a tiny piece to get lodged in a child’s windpipe to choke them. And let’s not even talk about batteries, especially button types....

When out and about with your toddler, the street is a good place to teach safety. Help them understand about traffic, crossing streets and to be wary of vehicles. Model the right behaviour and reinforce it often. Model the right behaviour and reinforce it often. (See? It works.)

Poisons can be found in all the rooms of a typical home. There are cleaning products, medicines including over-the-counter ones, solvents and even plants. Toddlers love to experience all their senses, and taste is such a great one! Remember that they can climb and are very creative at finding things, so locking up dangerous things is usually the best strategy.

In the kitchen, an overhanging pot handle can be very enticing; many a toddler has been seriously burned from their curiosity around the stove. And fire? They are fascinated by it. Keep matches and lighters out of sight as they will try to emulate mom or dad to light something up. You probably should also have plenty of well-located smoke alarms, too.

A good resource with detailed tips and suggestions for keeping your toddler safe is the [SafeKids Canada](#) website.

For exploration, toddlers would be a match for the likes of Captain Vancouver! Help them explore safely, and be vigilant because they are almost always ‘on’ even if you’re not ready.

*For exploration, toddlers
would be a match for the likes
of Captain Vancouver!*