

### ***How many children are injured in accidents?***

In the UK in 2003, 291 children aged under 15 died as the result of injury or poisoning. (England and Wales – 248; Scotland – 31; Northern Ireland – 12).

Accidental injury is one of the biggest single cause of death in UK for children over the age of one. More children die each year as the result of accidents than from illnesses such as leukaemia or meningitis.

Every year over 2 million children are taken to a hospital after having an accident. Around half of these accidents happen at home. These are the accidents we know about. Many more children are hurt in accidents but are treated at home or by a family doctor and so are not counted in official statistics.

### ***Are children's accidents increasing?***

The number of children's accidents has been declining steadily. In 1997 over 2.5 million children were taken to hospital after an accident. In 1998 this fell to 2.4 million and the number had dropped again to 2.28 million by 1999. The 2002 figure was 2.01 million. Accidental deaths also shown a steady fall although children from the poorest families are at much greater risk than those from the most affluent households.

### ***What type of accidents do children have in the home?***

In 2002, almost 900,000 children aged under 15 had an accident in the home with over 475,000 of these being under five.

#### ***Falls***

The largest number of non-fatal injuries happen when children fall. In 2002 390,000 children aged under 15 were taken to UK hospitals after a fall at home. Most falls are either slips or trips on the same level. Babies and young children are also hurt after falling from one level to another (such as from a chair, bed or changing table) or on or from stairs.

As with most home injuries, the under fives are most at risk. In 2002 230,000 children under five were taken to hospital after a fall. Nearly six in ten of these accidents involved boys.

#### ***Burns and scalds***

In 2002 almost 37,000 children aged under 15 were taken to hospital after an accident in the home resulting in a burn or scald. Scalds happen more often than burns and the most frequent cause of injuries are hot drinks.

House fires cause the most accidental deaths of children in the home. Thirty two children died in house fires in 2002.

## **Poisoning**

In 2002 over 26,000 children under 5 years were taken to hospital after a suspected poisoning, the great majority being in the home. Fortunately the vast majority of cases of suspected poisoning require little or no further treatment.

## **How many accidents happen on the roads?**

While falls account for the largest numbers of children's accidents both in the home and outside, road accidents cause the largest number of serious injuries and deaths.

In 2002, over 36,000 children were hurt in road accidents on UK roads. (See CAPT's Road Accidents factsheet for further information) Almost 200 of these children were killed and a further 4,600 were injured seriously enough for them to be admitted to hospital or suffer a fracture.

## **What other accidents do children have outside the home?**

Almost 1.1 million children under 15 were taken to hospital in 2002 after having an accident outside their home. From the age of about seven children become more likely to be injured when out and about than at home – reflecting where they spend the majority of their leisure time.

In 2002, among 5-14 year olds:

- almost 180,000 children were injured while playing sport. Ball sports such as football or basketball cause the most accidents.
- more than 360,000 children were injured in school, reflecting the proportion of their time that is spent there.

Over 33,000 children were injured in public playgrounds in 2002.

## **Further information**

The statistics used in this factsheet are drawn from a number of sources. The government's Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System that has collected information throughout the UK since 1978 was closed down in May 2003. The enquiry service will be maintained for 5 years. Enquiries should be directed to Information Centre, Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, Edgbaston Park, 353 Bristol Road, Birmingham B5 7ST, email: [infocentre@rospa.com](mailto:infocentre@rospa.com), fax: 0121 248 2001, tel: 0121 248 2066. Copies of the Annual Report of the Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System can be downloaded from or ordered via [www.dti.gov.uk/ccp/topics1/safety.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/ccp/topics1/safety.htm) - [hass](#).

Separate information on deaths and different types of accidents is available for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the internet.

Factsheets with more detailed information on a variety of accident topics can be found on the Child Accident Prevention Trust website, [www.capt.org.uk](http://www.capt.org.uk) or can be provided by post on receipt of a stamped address envelope and a list of the subjects you require.

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### ***What is an accident?***

In the dictionary accidents are defined as 'unforeseen events'. In fact, much can be done to reduce death and injury from accidents. In many cases they can be predicted and prevented.

### ***Why do children have accidents?***

Accidents to children are common as they develop and explore. The type of accidents children have relate very closely to their age and stage of physical development. Children are not small adults. They learn and develop rapidly and surprise us by how quickly they change. One day they may only be able to lie on their back. The next they will be able to roll over. Understanding the links between the development abilities of a child and the risks that these changes bring is essential to preventing accidents.

Accidents to children also happen because of they are naturally inquisitive and learn by exploring. Like most beginners they can be clumsy when first learning to do things. Young children do not have the experience or understanding to keep them safe from the hazards around them. Children should not be prevented from learning and developing naturally but they need to grow up in a safe environment protected from unnecessary harm. This requires a combined approach through education and training for adults who are involved in caring for children, safe product design and modifications to the environment.

It is also important for children, as they get older to learn how to deal with everyday risk like climbing the stairs, crossing the road, using knives or scissors or boiling a kettle. Learning to deal with risk is a skill that will help keep children safe as they grow up. Bumps and bruises are part of growing up and learning, but no one has to have an accident that results in serious injury.

### ***How many children have accidents?***

In 2002, about 320 children aged under 15 years died in the UK as the result of accidents. Each year, over two million children are taken to hospital after an accident – about half of these happen in the home.

Accidents are the main cause of death for children and young people. They are also a major cause of long-term disability and ill health.

### ***Which children are most at risk of accidents?***

Children have different accidents at different stages. Babies and toddlers have most accidents in the home, as this is where they spend most of their time. Typically the accidents they have are as a result of inexperience or poor coordination. By school age, children are experiencing fewer accidents in the home and more on the roads, at school and at play. Often these accidents are as a result of increased risk taking as children begin to test their limits.

The sex of a child also seems to be a factor in childhood accidents. Boys are approximately twice as likely as girls to have accidents. This may be a result of boys being more exposed to risk – more active, out and about more, more boisterous or aggressive or more subject to peer pressure.

Despite recent initiatives to reduce inequalities, children in the manual social classes are still estimated to be one and a half times more likely to die in accidents as other children. Any figures used are however indicators only as about a third of all deaths cannot be split by social class either because the information is not given or because no socio-economic class can be attributed.

The physical environment where a child lives or plays may have an influence on accidents. For example, high-rise flats with balconies or communal stairs where stairgates are not allowed, unsecured windows, cars parked in side streets or lack of public playgrounds can all increase the likelihood of accidents happening.

### ***How can accidents be prevented?***

Education, engineering and legislation can all be used to reduce accidents. However these approaches are most effective when used together rather than individually. For example seat belt law was only introduced after a major public education campaign. This meant that by the time people had to 'belt up' they were already aware of the safety reasons for doing so.

Other examples of effective safety products or changes to the environment are:

- traffic calming measures to reduce speed in residential areas
- child restraints in cars
- cycle helmets
- window locks
- smoke alarms
- child resistant tops on containers
- stairgates

Safe behaviour can also help to reduce children's accidents, for example:

- running cold water into a bath before hot to prevent scalds
- tidying up toys after use to reduce risk of falls
- turning pan handles to the back of the hob so that young children cannot reach up and pull them down
- emptying paddling pools after use to prevent drowning

Factsheets with more detailed statistical information can be found on the Child Accident Prevention Trust website. We also have a series of leaflets giving advice on different safety topics for parents and other carers.

Additional information can be posted on receipt of a stamped address envelope and a list of the subjects you require.

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