

Suffocation & Choking (Obstruction)

From 2008-2012, Unintentional Suffocation/Choking was the fourth leading cause of injury-related death in Washington State (621 deaths). It was leading cause of death among children under age five, and the second leading cause of death for people age 85 and older. Choking or Obstruction is when the airway is closed off due to a foreign body.

Key Messages to Help Reduce Risks

- ◆ Always place infants on their backs for sleeping. The “Back to Sleep” Campaign started in 1990. Since then, SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) deaths decreased by more than 50%.
- ◆ The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends infants always sleep on their backs, and not share a bed with parents, caregivers, or other children.
- ◆ Parents, caregivers, and siblings should not co-sleep with infants. From 1999-2001, 91% of infants who suffocated while sleeping were co-sleeping. The parent or sibling rolling over and covering the infant caused 75% of these deaths.
- ◆ Babies should sleep on a firm surface such as a safety-approved mattress covered by a fitted sheet.
- ◆ Keep soft objects, toys, pillows, and loose bedding out of the sleeping area.
- ◆ Do not allow smoking around your baby. Second-hand smoke causes breathing problems and lung damage.
- ◆ Young children have small airways and can easily choke on small toys, batteries, and other items; and foods such as candies, nuts, grapes, raisins, and pieces of hot dog or other meats – avoid these foods.
- ◆ Children can strangle on window cords, clothing drawstrings, some playground equipment if they slip, fall, and get entangled. If window cords are a continuous loop, cut the end to reduce strangulation risk. Remove drawstrings from clothing, such as sweatshirts and jackets.
- ◆ Children can also get entangled in openings big enough for their heads to get through, but too small for the rest of their body, such as: spaces in cribs, bunk beds, strollers, and high chairs – look for and remove these hazards.
- ◆ Keep cribs, beds, high chairs, and other furniture away from window coverings.
- ◆ Check the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) website www.cpsc.gov for recalled and dangerous child products. This is very important if you are using a hand-me-down or second-hand crib, portable crib, high chair, or other product. Do not use recalled child products or buy one from a second-hand store unless you are **sure** it has not been recalled. You can also sign up on the CPSC website to be informed of recalls as they are listed. It is illegal to sell a recalled product.

- ◆ When adults suffocate it's often due to under-chewed food that gets lodged in the throat or wind pipe and obstructs the airway.
- ◆ Other causes include use of sedative drugs, which depresses lung function; diseases affecting coordination or swallowing; or mental deficits.
- ◆ Adults need to take small bites, chew food thoroughly, and swallow fully before taking another bite. If there is difficulty, consult a doctor.
- ◆ If, during suffocation or choking incidents, the airway is blocked for too long, brain damage happens, leading to compromised mental functions.
- ◆ Caregivers and family members should learn Heimlich Maneuver to assist someone who is choking.

Information & Resources

- American Academy of Pediatrics www.aap.org
- Children's Safety Network www.ChildrensSafetyNetwork.org
- Healthy Children www.healthychildren.org
- National Institute for Child health and development www.nichd.nih.gov
- Safe Kids Washington www.safekidswashington.org
- Safe Kids Worldwide www.safekids.org
- To learn Heimlich Maneuver, Google it
- WA Department of Early Learning www.del.wa.gov

NOTE: No resources found for older adult choking/suffocation prevention

July 21, 2014