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## Factsheet

# Unintentional Childhood Injury

*Unintentional injury\* is considered one of the most serious public health problems facing children in the industrialised world today. Our children are particularly vulnerable to unintentional injury. Most unintentional injuries are predictable and therefore preventable.*

- Unintentional injury is a leading cause of death and hospitalisation for New Zealand children aged 0 to 14 years <sup>1, 2</sup>.
- Internationally, New Zealand performs badly in preventing injury related child deaths. In a table of child injury deaths New Zealand ranked 22nd out of 25 other OECD countries. If New Zealand had achieved the same injury rate as that of Sweden during the same five year period, **324 children would still be alive today** <sup>3</sup>.
- Variations occur in injury mortality and morbidity which reflect a child's age, gender, socio-economic status, culture and even location. Many studies reveal a strong relationship between injury and social deprivation and boys have higher numbers of injuries across most injury causes, compared with girls <sup>4</sup>.

## Injury Related Child Deaths

**On average, every week in New Zealand two children die as a result of an unintentional injury** <sup>5</sup>.

Motor vehicle crashes are the largest single cause of child death from unintentional injury. They account for over half of all injury related child fatalities in New Zealand. This includes deaths of children as passengers, pedestrians and cyclists <sup>6, 7</sup>.

## Leading Causes of Child Deaths (0-14 years) in New Zealand from Unintentional Injury (1997-2001) <sup>5</sup>

Motor Vehicle Occupancy	<i>The largest single cause of child injury death was to children travelling as passengers in vehicles; with 108 children (an average of 22 children a year) killed during this period.</i>
Child Pedestrians	<i>During the same time 70 child pedestrians (an average of 14 children a year) died.</i>
Drowning	<i>Seventy-three children (an average of just over 14 a year) drowned. Children aged 0 to 4 were most at risk of drowning, as were children of Maori descent. While Maori children accounted for 23% of the child population, 44% of all preschoolers who drowned were Maori <sup>8, 9</sup>.</i>
Fire and Flames	<i>Forty-five children (an average of 9 a year) died of burns from fire and hot substances. Children playing with matches, candles and lighters are a major factor in fatal fires <sup>10</sup>.</i>
Suffocation	<i>Eighty-five children died from unintentional suffocation between 1997 and 2001. Of these children, 78 were aged under four years.</i>
Cycling	<i>On average, 6 children a year died while cycling on our roads.</i>

*Safekids New Zealand's mission is to reduce the incidence and severity of unintentional injuries to New Zealand children aged 0-14 years.*

## The Injury Picture for Hospitalisations

- Annually, in New Zealand, more than 9,800 children are hospitalised with an unintentional injury. This equates to **188 children every week, or the equivalent number of an average sized classroom of children a day** being injured severely enough to be admitted to hospital for one night, or longer. Many more children are treated for injuries at Accident & Emergency clinics, by their local GP and at home <sup>5, 11</sup>.
- Falls are the leading single cause of injury related hospitalisation for children of all ages. This is followed overall by hospitalisations for road traffic crashes (when injuries for child cyclists, pedestrians and car occupants are combined)<sup>5</sup>.
- Different ethnic groups appear to be at risk of different kinds of injuries. Maori and Pasifika children are over represented in motor vehicle crash statistics while non-Maori and Pasifika children are at increased risk of unintentional poisoning.
- Boys are more likely than girls to be hospitalised with an unintentional injury <sup>5</sup>.
- In addition to the trauma and personal cost to families of hospital admissions for injury, they are a major contributor to health costs. The average cost of an injury admission has been estimated to be 10% greater than that of a non-injury admission <sup>12</sup>.

### The Leading Causes of Hospitalisation due to Unintentional Child Injury, New Zealand (2003)<sup>5</sup>

0 – 4 Year Olds	5 – 9 Year Olds	10 – 14 Year Olds
<i>Falls 1,074 children</i>	<i>Falls 2,072 children</i>	<i>Falls 1,323 children</i>
<i>Poisoning 303 children</i>	<i>Pedestrian, Cycling and Motor Vehicle Crashes (all 'transport related' causes included) 456 children</i>	<i>Pedestrian, Cycling and Motor Vehicle Crashes (all 'transport related' causes included) 748 children</i>
<i>Fire and Hot Object / Substance 238 children</i>	<i>Cut/Pierce 211 children</i>	<i>Struck By / Against 303 children</i>
<i>Pedestrian, Cycling and Motor Vehicle Crashes (all 'transport related' causes included) 200 children</i>	<i>Struck By / Against 170 children</i>	<i>Cut/Pierce 257 children</i>
<i>Struck By / Against 156 children</i>	<i>Fire and Hot Object / Substance 37 children</i>	<i>Poisoning 48 children</i>
<i>Cut / Pierce 105 children</i>	<i>Poisoning 31 children</i>	<i>Fire and Hot Object / Substance 39 children</i>

## Conclusion

Child injury is often not considered a priority in New Zealand, yet it is a major child health problem. Improved injury prevention can only be achieved when there is adequate recognition of this problem, and government and communities work together to highlight the importance and value of child safety measures.

*\*Unintentional injuries (as opposed to intentional injuries) are the kind usually referred to as accidents.*

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