

Unintentional injuries: A short evidence briefing

Why is this issue important?

Unintentional injuries are a leading cause of death, ill health and disability in children and young people. In 2016/17, about one in nine emergency hospital admissions among children and one in 15 child deaths in Scotland were the result of unintentional injuries.¹ However, the majority of unintentional injuries do not result in death or hospital admission but are treated by GPs, A&E departments or by parents/carers.¹

Unintentional injuries are the result of events that can, usually, be prevented.² They can occur in the home, at school, on the road and during play. Children under five years of age are at most risk from injuries in the home.³

Are there inequalities to consider?

Children living in a low-income household and/or in temporary, rented and social housing are at greater risk. Boys and children living in the most deprived areas are more likely to be admitted to hospital as a result of an unintentional injury.⁴

Children living in disadvantaged areas can face increased risks from the built environment, e.g. dense housing, proximity to fast-moving traffic, high levels of on-street parking and limited facilities.⁴

Challenges and solutions

- Parenting programmes are effective in reducing unintentional injuries in children and can improve home safety.⁵

- Home safety interventions, especially when safety equipment (e.g. smoke alarms, window restrictors or carbon monoxide alarms) is supplied and fitted, are effective in improving safety practices and may reduce injury rates.³
- Home safety education can improve safety knowledge but may not reduce injuries.⁶
- The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends that households where children are considered to be at greatest risk should be offered a structured home assessment followed by advice and support, tailored to their individual circumstances, to reduce risk.⁴
- Reduced speed zones around schools and playgrounds lower vehicle speeds. In general, 20 mph limits and zones prevent and reduce the severity of injuries.⁶

Examples of positive action

- The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Scotland: **Scotland's Big Book of Accident Prevention.**
- The '**Not for Play**' campaign is aimed at tackling the growing number of liquid laundry capsule ingestion injuries to children in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Board area. Children, averaging 18 months old, were being brought to the emergency department at the Royal Hospital for Children (Yorkhill) after consuming liquid laundry capsules. These products, if ingested, can cause serious injury.
- '**Straight Off, Straight Away**' is a campaign in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to raise awareness of hair straightener burns to children. The campaign urges parents and carers to turn straighteners 'straight off', and put them 'straight away'. As hair straighteners can reach temperatures up to 230°C, they can cause serious burns if touched.

Main indicators[†]

- Unintentional injuries in under-fives (CYP).

Linked indicators

- Infant deaths (CYP).
- Deaths in children aged 1–15 years (CYP).
- Households with children living in homes that fail the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) (CYP).
- Active travel to school (CYP).

Resources

- **RoSPA Scotland.**
- NHS Health Scotland. **Unintentional injuries e-learning module.**
- NHS Health Scotland. **Unintentional injuries and home safety guidance; 2017.**
- NHS Health Scotland. **Place and communities inequality briefing; 2016.**
- NHS Health Scotland. **Public health interventions to prevent unintentional injuries among the under 15s; 2014.**
- Public Health England. **Road injury prevention. Resources to support schools to promote safe active travel; 2016.**
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. **Unintentional injuries among under-15s pathway.**
- Hayes M, Kendrick D, Deave T. Injury prevention briefing. **Prevention of unintentional injuries to the under-fives: a guide for practitioners; 2014.**
- Hayes M, Kendrick D. **A guide for commissioners of child health services on preventing unintentional injuries among the under-fives; 2016.**
- ScotPHO. **Children and young people: key points.**
- ScotPHO. **Injuries: key points.**

[†] The letters in brackets indicate the profile the indicator can be found in. CYP = children and young people's profile; HWB = health and wellbeing profile.

References

- ¹ Information Services Division. **Unintentional injuries in Scotland**. Edinburgh: ISD; 2018.
- ² National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. **Preventing unintentional injury in under 15s. Quality standard. QS107**. Manchester: NICE; 2016.
- ³ Kendrick D, Young B, et al. **Home safety education and provision of safety equipment for injury prevention**. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews; 2012.
- ⁴ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. **Evidence update 29: Strategies to prevent unintentional injuries among children and young people aged under 15**. Manchester: NICE; 2013.
- ⁵ Kendrick D, Mulvaney CA, et al. **Parenting interventions for the prevention of unintentional injuries in childhood**. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews; 2013.
- ⁶ Public Health England. **Reducing unintentional injuries on the roads among children and young people under 25 years**. London: Public Health England; 2014.