

Safety in the Driveway

Tragically one child, often a toddler, is run over in the driveway of its own home every week in Australia.

More than one third of children under six years of age killed in motor vehicle accidents were killed 'off road' in yards, car parks and driveways.

Children aged one to two years are the most likely to be killed or injured in home driveways. The vehicle is usually only moving slowly and is often being driven by a parent, relative or friend.

A slow moving vehicle reversing down a driveway can trap a child, causing fatal crush injuries. Children who survive are often left with severe long-term injuries.

We don't think of children as being in danger in such a familiar environment, but they are.

Why the risk?

Young children are naturally inquisitive and want to see what is going on. They move surprisingly fast and can run into the street without warning.

In the time it takes for the driver to say goodbye and start the car, a child can move from a 'safe' position onto the driveway and into the path of the vehicle. Small children, particularly toddlers, can be impossible to see from inside a car, especially if they are directly behind it.

Most drivers are aware of their car's 'blind spots' however the rear vision of a number of popular cars has been tested and results show that there is in fact a large 'blind space' behind most cars, particularly when reversing.

Even if your car has parking sensors or a video camera fitted, you may not notice a small child until it is too late to stop.

The Facts

Most driveway accidents occur at the child's home, where both the parent and the child may feel that the child is safe.

Driveway accidents mainly involve toddlers, who are old enough to be mobile but are too small to be easily visible from the driving position when close to the vehicle.

Majority of the vehicles involved in the driveway accidents are large 4WD passenger vehicles, utility vehicles, delivery vans and heavy trucks. There is reduced visibility in these vehicles, particularly when reversing.

The highest proportion of driveway fatal accidents occur on weekdays in the early morning between 8:00am and 10:00am and in the late afternoon between 4:00pm and 6:00pm.

Most accidents occur in fine weather and bright conditions.

Children are more vulnerable on local streets and driveways.



Case Study 1

One-year-old Estelle was helping her mum wind up the hose in the backyard of her home, when her dad accidentally reversed his car over her. Her mum had realised that the garden hose was caught and she momentarily took her eyes off Estelle.

When she turned back, there was Estelle lying underneath the car. Her head was free of the car wheels, but she could see that she'd obviously been run over. She was having a lot of difficulty breathing. She was very blue.

Incredibly, Estelle escaped serious injury, but her parents remain haunted by their close call. They find it hard to believe that the car ran right over her middle and she's still with them today.

Driveway accidents commonly occur by:

- Young children being left unsupervised in a seemingly secure location indoor, managing to get outdoors and into the path of a vehicle with the driver being unaware of the child's presence.
- Drivers making a risky decision or a driver making an error.
- Young children playing outside and suddenly moving into the path of a moving vehicle, unknown to the driver.



Case Study 2

Unknown to his parents, a 20-month-old boy was playing in the driveway at home. The back door was open and there was no fencing restricting access to the driveway. The father was reversing his four-wheel-drive vehicle out of the garage when he felt a bump. He stopped and discovered his son underneath the vehicle between the tyres.

On arrival at the hospital, the child was alert but distressed and uncooperative. Clinical examination revealed bilateral conjunctival haemorrhages and facial petechiae characteristic of traumatic asphyxia.

There was an abrasion of the lower chest and anterior abdominal wall, with a tyre mark on the left shin. Radiological investigations, including a computed tomography scan of the head, chest and abdomen, revealed mild cerebral oedema, pulmonary contusions of both lower lobes, a subcapsular splenic haematoma and a minimally displaced fracture of the upper third of the left tibia.

The boy was transferred to the New Children's Hospital, where his injuries were treated non-operatively. He required intubation for worsening gas exchange, but was able to be extubated within 72 hours. He was discharged home 12 days after the injury and was completely well three months later. Both parents required extensive counseling by a social worker. They no longer own the vehicle.

Safety Steps

Always supervise your children and do not leave them alone to play especially when they are near parked or moving vehicles. Hold their hands or hold them close to keep them safe.

If you are the only adult at home and need to move a vehicle, even only a small distance, place your child securely in the vehicle with you while you move it.

Make access to the driveway from the house difficult for young children, possibly by using security doors, fencing or gates.

Drivers should walk around their vehicle before leaving an area where children may have been.

Don't let your children use the driveway as a play area; create safe play areas for your children.

Children learn mostly by observation and imitation. Examples set by parents can have effects on their behaviour.



For further information

Refer to the "Where are your kids: Child Safety in your driveway" brochure or visit: www.sgio.com.au/reversing

Kidsafe WA © 2005

Excerpts may be copied for educational purposes. Written permission is required to copy this fact sheet in its entirety.

For more information ☎ (08) 9340 8509

Child Safety Information Line ☎ 1800 802 244

Poisons Information Centre ☎ 13 11 26

www.kidsafewa.com.au

The printing of this Fact Sheet is proudly supported by:

