

Defying Gravity



Safe Kids of Western Mass., headquartered at Baystate Children's Hospital, has teamed up with trauma surgeons at Baystate Medical Center to stress the importance of window guards on all windows above the first floor, preferably guards equipped with an emergency release device in case of fire.

"A screen is not a safety device," says Dr. Ronald Gross, chief of Baystate Medical Center's Trauma and Emergency Surgical Services. "It's designed to keep insects out, not to keep children in. Proper safety guards on windows save lives."

Window guards are not required by law in Massachusetts, but are recommended in homes with children age six and under. "In an apartment in a high-rise building, window guards should be considered essential safety equipment," says Gross.

"Still, no safety device can take the place of active adult supervision," notes Mandi Summers, co-coordinator, Safe Kids of Western Mass. "Toddlers have been known to fall out of windows open as

little as five inches." She also reminds parents and caregivers to keep windows locked when they're closed, and keep furniture away from windows so kids can't climb to the ledge.

If you have double-hung windows—the kind that can open down from the top, as well as up from the bottom—it is generally safer to open the top pane, but growing kids may have enough strength, dexterity, and curiosity to open the bottom pane. Don't assume an unlocked window is childproof.

Also, tie the curtain pulls or blind cords out of reach—kids have been strangled while playing with dangling cords. Install safety tassels on the ends of the curtain pulls, or cut the loops, so a child is less likely to get trapped.

For more child safety information, visit baystatehealth.org/safekids.

MOST FALLS HAPPEN AT HOME AND THE RISK OF INJURY INCREASES WITH AGE. BUT FALLS AREN'T ISOLATED TO THE ELDERLY; ALL AGE GROUPS ARE VULNERABLE. AMONG CHILDREN, FALLS ARE THE LEADING CAUSE OF UNINTENTIONAL INJURIES.

Windows pose a particularly dangerous hazard, especially for young children. Every year, nearly 4,000 kids nationwide—mostly toddlers—fall out of windows. A child who falls even 10 feet can suffer spinal cord injury, paralysis, and fatal head injuries.

BALANCING ACT

Here are a few simple actions you can take to prevent falls in other areas of your home as well:

- Remove area rugs if possible. If not, choose rugs with slip-resistant backing or secure them with foam carpet backing, double-sided tape, or a rubber pad.
- Keep steps, landings, and floors free of clutter. Remove tripping hazards such as papers, wires and cords, or toys. Sweep floors often and promptly wipe up spills.
- Make sure your stair handrails are sturdy and on both sides, if possible. Repair broken or worn steps.
- Use a step stool with a bar to hold onto for out-of-reach items instead of climbing on counters or chairs.
- Add night lights to your hallways and especially in your bathroom.
- Think before you act. If it doesn't seem safe, it probably isn't.