

Top FIVE Surprising Baby Product Dangers

By Stacey L. Bradford Reporter, SmartMoney.com

NEW PARENTS ALWAYS worry about the safety of their baby. Most have heard the warnings against buying a used crib (many don't comply with current safety standards) and letting an infant zoom around in a baby walker (a child could easily tumble down a flight of stairs). But there are plenty of other commonly used products that can also put a child in harm's way.

Here are five lesser-known dangers you should keep out of your baby's reach.

1. *At Meal Time*

Product: Sippy Cup

Danger: Tooth Decay

Parents love sippy cups, but dentists despise them. Why? Those convenient no-spill contraptions (which have a valve beneath the spout) can cause tooth decay. Despite appearances, sippy cups are nothing more than baby bottles in disguise, says the American Dental Association. So when an infant sucks on one, the milk or juice comes in direct contact with the back of the teeth and generates bacteria.

What should you use instead? To curb tooth decay the American Dental Association says babies should stop using a bottle and begin drinking out of a regular cup by their first birthday. If some hand-holding is required during the transition, consider a training cup with a lid and open spout that will teach your child how to properly sip a beverage while limiting spills.

2. *For the Changing Table*

Product: Baby Wipes Warmer

Danger: Electrical Shock and Fire Hazard

Most parents would never consider wrapping their baby in an electric blanket. Yet many mothers and fathers buy baby-wipe warmers that carry the same risk of starting a fire. Over the past decade at least three manufacturers had their warmers recalled by the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission when cracks in the interior tub allowed water to come into contact with the unit's electrical components.

If you absolutely must keep your baby's bottom warm during those 4AM diaper changes, consider using a warm wash cloth or simply heating up a wipe between your hands, suggests Alan Fields, co-author of baby products guide 'Baby Bargains.' Not only can you avoid a fire or electric shock, but you'll also save yourself some aggravation. Parents often complain that the warmers dry out their supply of wipes, leaving them scrambling to find a substitute in the middle of the night.

3. When Baby-Proofing

Product: Plastic Outlet Covers

Danger: Choking Hazard

Ironically, even some baby-proofing products aren't safe. Consider the plastic single electrical outlet cover. At first glance they seem brilliant. Just pop one in and no small fingers will be finding their way into the socket. What parents don't consider is that a baby can easily choke on one if Mom pulls the cover out to do a little vacuuming and then forgets to reinsert it into the wall. "As a general rule anything that is small enough to fit through the tube of a roll of toilet paper is a choking hazard," says Dr. Garry Gardner, a pediatrician who sits on the American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention.

Instead, parents should consider swapping out their traditional outlet plate covers with one that has sliding plastic doors to cover the sockets, suggests Fields. They're not only safer, but also more convenient to use.

4. For the Nursery

Product: Baby Bedding – fluffy quilt, bumper, pillows

Danger: Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and Suffocation

It can be tempting to adorn a nursery with cozy bedding sets complete with fluffy quilt, bumper and matching pillows. But most safety experts recommend avoiding them for fear of suffocation or rebreathing (when a child breathes in his previously exhaled carbon dioxide) that can lead to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). "We believe the crib should be naked," says Don Mays, senior director of product safety and consumer sciences for Consumer Reports. "Put the baby in warm clothing and remove all soft bedding."

Worried about those tiny limbs getting caught between the crib's slats? The danger is overstated, says Mays. But if you must have something, he recommends purchasing a mesh bumper that a child can breathe through. Just remember to take it out by the time the baby is about five months old and can use it to climb over the crib's railing, recommends the American Academy of Pediatrics.

5. At Nap Time

Product: Sleep Positioners

Danger: Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and Suffocation

Another sleeping hazard: the sleep positioner. This is a piece of foam that's used to prevent a baby from turning over onto his or her stomach. (Sleep experts warn that infants shouldn't sleep on their tummies since it could cause SIDS.) "While it was designed for safety it actually compromises it," says Consumer Reports' Mays. As babies in a positioner turn their heads from side to side the foam can conform to the face and cause suffocation and rebreathing. A safer sleep option is to snugly swaddle infants for the first few months. Then once they are strong enough to turn over on their own, it's safe to let them move around and sleep however they want.