



Families Urged to Take Window Safety Measures as Temperatures Rise

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Falls from windows and balconies are increasingly becoming a common danger and risk for families with young children. With warmer weather now upon us, it's important for parents and caregivers of little ones to remember that an open window is also a serious safety hazard and to take precautions to ensure children remain uninjured during warmer months.

BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) and BC Children's Hospital have partnered with CHOA to increase awareness and share tips to prevent falls from windows and balconies.

Between 2009 and 2015, 146 children were treated at trauma centres around the province after falling from a window or balcony. Approximately 85 per cent of these hospitalizations involved children between the ages of one and six.*

"From broken bones to severe bleeding in the brain, these types of falls can be life-altering for everyone involved," said Dr. Ash Singhal, a pediatric neurosurgeon and the medical director of the BC Children's trauma program. "I've seen it first-hand and have operated on numerous children with brain injuries from window and balcony falls. Parents always say the same thing: I wish I had known; I wish I could go back and prevent it."

Children are naturally curious and love to climb, and often do not realize when they are putting themselves at risk. Even small children are capable of pushing open an unlocked window, and toddlers, who have a higher centre of gravity, can easily fall headfirst through a window screen if they lean against it.

"It is heart-breaking that window falls involving toddlers and young children happen too often every spring and summer," said Marilyn Oberg, a paramedic with BCEHS. "Fortunately for parents and caregivers, falls from windows or balconies are easily preventable by following our safety tips that help keep children out of harm's way during the hot weather season."

"We know it's important to condo owners to ensure the safety, security and well-being of their family members, tenants and guests," said Tony Gioventu, executive director of the Condominium Home Owners Association of BC. "They should make sure their units are safe and free of hazards, especially when small children are involved. We encourage all owners to follow these tips to prevent window and balcony falls."

** Data provided by the BC Trauma Registry.*

Make this summer a memorable one for all the right reasons—simple preparation and proactive planning to eliminate hazards and safeguard windows could make all the difference.

Tips to prevent falls from windows and balconies:

- Don't underestimate a child's mobility; children begin climbing before they can walk.
- Move furniture and household items away from windows to discourage children from climbing to peer out.
- Be particularly mindful of toddlers, who may climb on anything to get higher.
- Remember that window screens will not prevent children from falling through. They keep bugs out – not children in.
- Install window guards on windows above the ground level. These act as a gate in front of the window.
- Alternatively, fasten your windows so that they cannot open more than 10 centimetres (four inches). Children can fit through spaces as small as 12 centimetres (five inches) wide.
- In either case, ensure there is a safe release option for your windows in case of a house fire.
- Don't leave children unattended on balconies or decks. Move furniture or planters away from the edges to keep kids from climbing up and over.
- Talk to your children about the dangers of opening and playing near windows, particularly on upper floors of the home or in a high-rise dwelling.
- Consider installing safety glass in large windows and French doors so they won't shatter if a child runs or falls into them.