

Window Safety Program

Final Report to the Minnesota Legislature 2011

Minnesota Department of Health

September 2011



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Window Safety Program

September 2011

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2011 Window Safety Education Program Legislative Report

Executive Summary

2007 Minnesota Session Law (Chapter 147, Article 16, Sec. 19) required the Minnesota Department of Health to provide targeted education on window safety. The report details actions accomplished through the window safety education program by the MDH. The activities highlighted below are described in more detail. The report also provides the most current window fall injury data.

This is the final report required by legislation and includes recommendations for possible future actions to address window safety.

- The Window Safety Advisory Committee was convened in 2008 to discuss recommendations for educational efforts related to window safety.
- Window safety messages were incorporated into the [Home Safety Checklist](#) used by local public health departments when they visit new families.
- Minnesota Department developed and updates a [window safety web page](#) which is available to the public.
- Window safety education information is posted on the [Minnesota Parents Know](#) website.
- A news release was issued in April of 2008 reminding parents to check their homes for window safety. This will be incorporated as an annual activity with release timed for the spring when windows begin to be opened.
- Window safety information is discussed with maternal and child health staff in local public health departments and appropriate MDH grantees providing services to young children and their families.
- The Home Safety Checklist and Reference Guide, which includes a question on and resources about window safety, was updated during 2009 and is available at
- “Keep the Promise” window safety educational brochures have been widely distributed and continue to be available on the MDH website.

Severe injury and death resulting from window falls is a relatively rare event; however the tragedy of a preventable child death deeply impacts a family and community. Simple, effective prevention methods will continue to be promoted through the MDH’s Family Home Visiting Program, local public health departments and web-based window safety education materials.

2011 Window Safety Education Program Legislative Report

Background

In 2007, Minnesota Session Law, Chapter 147, Article 16, Sec. 19 required the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to provide targeted education on residential window safety and window safety requirements (Appendix A). The law directed MDH to create a safety program to raise awareness of the precautions needed to prevent children from falling through open windows.

The commissioner of health was required to provide window safety awareness. The commissioner has accomplished this through the collaborative efforts of the Family Home Visiting Program in the Community and Family Health Division and the Injury and Violence Prevention Unit in the Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Division. Legislation directed the MDH to submit a final report on the Window Safety Education Program in 2011.

Window Safety Data

Epidemiologists in the Injury and Violence Prevention Unit at the MDH regularly review injury data to identify deaths and severe trauma resulting from falls from windows. Cases are identified from injuries resulting in death, hospitalized traumatic brain or spinal cord injury, or inclusion in the state trauma system. Injuries resulting in lesser severity are not able to be specifically attributed to window falls. As such, the reviewed data represent the “tip of the iceberg” of all injuries due to window falls.

Figures 1 and 2 show window falls in Minnesota that resulted in severe injury to or death of children under the age of 10 from 1993 to 2010. Severe injury and death resulting from window falls is a relatively rare event. While there are more than 690,000 children under the age of 10 living in Minnesota, there are fewer than 25 such events in any year. Rare events may “cluster” in space and time; these may be statistically significant but may not be related to exposure.

The data suggest that, while deaths have decreased, nonfatal injury events have continued to occur and increase over time, despite the awareness and education efforts of local and state public health staff, rental landlords and apartment managers, the window manufacturing industry, and non-profit organizations (Brain Injury Association of Minnesota, Minnesota Safety Council and Minnesota Safe Kids). However, increases may also result from improvements in the reporting systems used to identify the cases.

Nationally, Dr. Gary Smith and colleagues found that more than 5,000 children each year (14 children each day) in the United States are treated at hospital emergency departments for injuries caused from window falls ([*Falls From Windows Claiming Too Many Children's Lives*](#); [*Pediatric Injuries Attributable to Falls From Windows in the United States in 1990–2008*](#); and [*5,000 Kids A Year Hurt In Falls From Windows*](#)).

Boys were involved in more falls from windows than were girls. In addition, the younger children comprised two-thirds of the injuries. The injury rate was highest at age 2. Many of the children under five years of age experienced injuries to their head or face, and, often times, these led to hospitalization or death. On the other hand, children aged five to 17 years were more likely to have fractures to their arms or legs.

Figure 1
Fall from Window Resulting in Severe Injury, MN

Potential for reporting bias: From year 2007 *Report of Injury* forms added a "fall from window" check-off box; data from previous years included only keyword searches of text fields.

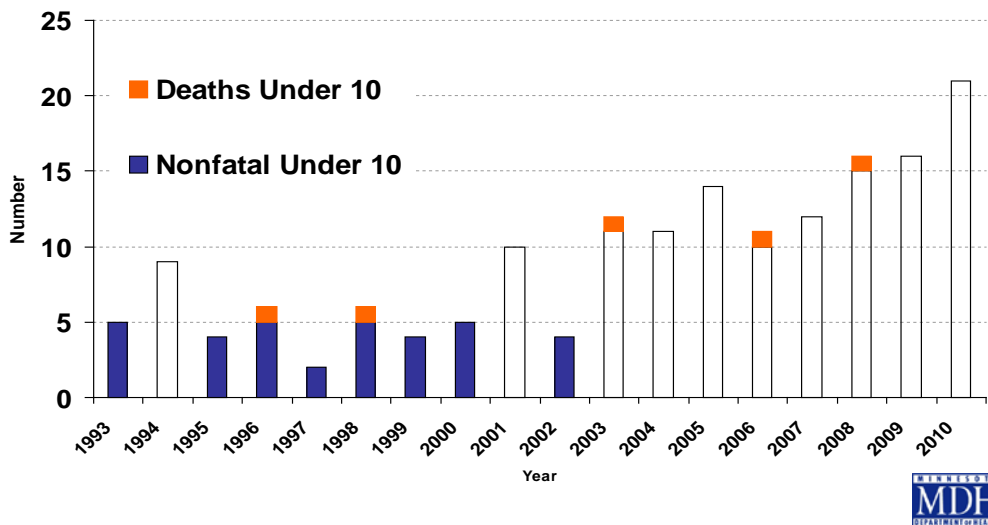
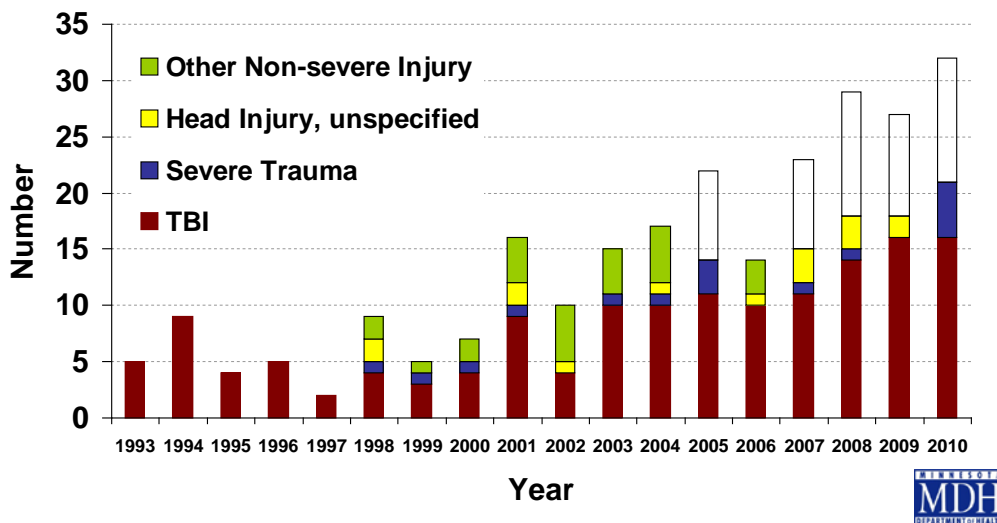


Figure 2

Fall from Window Resulting in Nonfatal Injury, MN

Potential for reporting bias: From year 2007 *Report of Injury* forms added a "fall from window" check-off box; data from previous years included only keyword searches of text fields.



Window Safety Education

In April 2008, during National Window Safety Week, the MDH issued a news release on window safety (Appendix B). The Window Safety Advisory Committee was convened in May 2008. The charge to the committee was to advise the MDH on developing a window safety awareness program to prevent children from falling through open windows. The committee was encouraged to explore ideas and strategies for providing window safety awareness education to parents and caregivers of young children.

The group concurred that key window safety messages have already been developed and it is more efficient and effective to utilize existing resources and messages. The committee recommended use of existing educational venues and opportunities including distributing the “[Keeping the Promise of Safety](#)” brochure at the 2008 Minnesota State Fair (Appendix C). This information continues to be available on the MDH [Family Home Visiting website](#).

Throughout 2009 and 2010, window safety education materials were distributed to local public health department family home visitors through the Community Health Services (CHS) Mailbag and at regional maternal and child health meetings and to Positive Alternatives grantees. The window safety web page on the MDH Family Home Visiting program web site was updated in 2009. Materials posted or linked to on the page were reviewed and the overall look of the page was enhanced so it is easier to scan and more user-friendly. New materials and links continue to be added to the website as they become available. A screenshot of the [window safety web page](#) can be found in (Appendix D).

Home safety educational information for parents (including window safety) is posted on the [Minnesota Parents Know](#) web site, hosted by the Minnesota Department of Education. This information includes a link back to the MDH home safety web page. The *Minnesota Parents Know* site contains trusted child development, health and parenting information for parents of children of all ages.

The [Home Safety Checklist and Reference Guide](#), including a question about and resources on window safety, was updated in 2009. A committee consisting of local public health and MDH staff provided input and feedback on the revisions. The Window Safety Advisory Committee recommended wording for the question pertaining specifically to window safety as well as the revised content in the reference guide. The updated Home Safety Checklist and Reference Guide can be found in (Appendix E) and on the [window safety web page](#).

The window safety legislation required the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (MDLI) to adopt rules for window fall prevention devices as part of the Minnesota State Building Code by July 1, 2009. The MDH participated on the Window Fall Prevention Advisory Committee, sponsored by the MDLI. This committee developed the recommendations for rule language regarding window screens, window locks and a window safety device.

The MDH will continue to identify effective methods to promote the revised Home Safety Checklist and Reference Guide in conjunction with window safety education. The resource was shared with participants of the second Annual Minnesota Childhood Injury Prevention Summit in September 2010. Additionally, the checklist remains available on the MDH [Family Home Visiting Window Safety website](#).

The MDH and several local community and statewide partners participate in the promotion of Text4baby. This free service sends pregnancy and parenting information via text message to mothers until their child's first birthday. National Text4baby is now including messages on window safety in its messages to mothers. More information is available at: <http://text4baby.org/>

Window Safety Recommendations for Further Study and Action

- Epidemiologists from the MDH should continue to monitor death and injury data and track trends. They should identify locations in the state where the preponderance of events are occurring. And, they should analyze by census tract to determine other risk or social co-factors that may be influencing window fall risk.
- Program staff members should utilize partnerships and educational venues such as those described in this report to continue to raise awareness about how to prevent window falls.
- Program staff members should engage the [statewide comprehensive trauma system](#) as partners in the education, awareness and messaging prevention program.
- MDH will continue to make home and window safety information available on the MDH [home safety website](#).
- MDH will continue to promote Text4baby to local public health and other partners.

Statute Mandating Window Safety Education Legislative Report

2007 Minnesota Session Law, Chapter 147, Article 16, Sec. 19. WINDOW SAFETY EDUCATION

The commissioner of health shall create in the department's current educational safety program a component targeted at parents and caregivers of young children to provide awareness of the need to take precautions to prevent children from falling through open windows. The commissioner of health shall consult with representatives of the residential building industry, the window products industry, the child safety advocacy community, and the Department of Labor and Industry to create the window safety program component. The program must include the gathering of data about falls from windows that result in severe injury in order to measure the effectiveness of the safety program. The commissioner of health may consult with other child safety advocacy groups, experts, and interested parties in the development and implementation of the window safety program. The commissioner of health shall prepare and submit a final report on the window safety program to the legislature by March 1, 2011. The commissioner shall prepare and submit a yearly progress report to the legislature by March 1 of each year beginning in 2008 until the submission of the final report. The final report must include a summary of the safety program, the impact of the program on children falling from windows, and any recommendations for further study or action.

Minnesota Department of Health
News Release (April 21, 2008)

With warmer weather, health officials urge parents to check window safety

April 20-26, is National Window Safety Week

Falls from windows account for an estimated 12 deaths and 4,000 injuries among children under 10 years of age every year in the U.S. In Minnesota, between 1993 and 2007, there were at least 193 serious injuries from unintentional window falls, with 19 being fatal. Of these, 151 were among children under 10 years of age, with four fatalities.

“Warmer weather and National Window Safety Week remind us how important it is to check our homes for window safety,” said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Dr. Sanne Magnan. “There are simple steps we can all take to prevent injuries and deaths from tragic window falls.” Commissioner Magnan urges Minnesotans, especially parents and child caregivers, to follow these recommendations:

- Do not rely on insect screens to keep children from falling out of windows. They are neither designed nor intended to keep children from falling out of windows.
- Keep furniture – or anything children can use to climb – away from windows. Children may use such objects to climb to an open window and potentially fall.
- Provide careful supervision of children. Careful supervision greatly reduces the risk of falls and injuries, so watch children as they play.
- Consult your local fire department or building code official for more information about the proper use of window guards.
- Be aware that the window guards or window fall prevention devices must have a release mechanism so that they can be opened for escape in a fire emergency.
- Include windows in home emergency escape plans. Be sure to identify all doors and windows that can be used. Make sure they open easily, and keep escape routes free from clutter.
- Develop and practice an emergency escape plan in the event that fire or smoke blocks the primary exit. Children may have to rely on a window to escape in a fire, so help them learn to safely use a window under these circumstances.

Michael Fischer, director of advocacy for the Window & Door Manufacturers Association and a member of the National Safety Council’s Window Safety Task Force, reminds parents to think about window safety.

“Many window falls happen in spring when windows are opened to let in spring breezes,” Fischer said. “Insect screens are designed to keep bugs out and not to keep children in. Whenever small children are present, it is important to keep windows closed.”

For more information about window safety, see the [National Safety Council Window Safety web page](#).

-MDH / For more information, contact John Stieger, MDH Communications / 651-201-4998



Keeping
the promise

of safety.

window safety awareness

2011 Window Safety Program Legislative Report

Every day you
whisper a promise
to your child, “I’ll
always love you
and keep you safe.”

But keeping your
home and children
safe takes more
than promises.

It can only be
done with safety
awareness,
planning and
preventive action.

fires and falls of all kinds are among
the leading causes of injury and
death in young children. While some
falls occur from windows, it’s important
to realize that in a fire, a window can
save a child’s life. That is why windows
play a critical role in home safety.

Fire is frightening. All too often, the bodies of young children are found after a fire in places where they tried to hide. Teach your children that they can't hide from fire: They must escape it. Decide on at least two emergency escape routes from your home. Windows provide one of the fastest, easiest alternative ways out of a burning home. Teach children how to safely escape through windows and take time to practice with them.

Windows can serve as emergency escape routes.

Every family member should know how to operate the windows used for fire emergencies. Delays in escaping from a fire cost lives and increase injuries. Often paint, dirt or weathering can seal a window shut. Make sure yours open easily from the inside and are not blocked by furniture or other objects.

Remember that security bars, grilles and grates not only keep intruders out, they can also lock you in. The same holds true for window guards. Everyone should always be able to get out through a window without using tools, keys, special knowledge or effort.

Window safety.

Preventing falls out of windows is as important as learning how to use one in an emergency. Unattended children run the greatest risk of falls and injuries, so the best first step is to watch your children as they play. Nothing can substitute for careful supervision.

When youngsters are around, close and lock your windows. If you need ventilation, open only windows they cannot reach. Be sure to keep furniture - or anything children can climb - away from windows. And teach your children not to play near windows.

Never depend on insect screens to prevent falls. Insect screens are designed to provide ventilation. They will not hold a child's weight against them.

Only solid information and proper preparations can help you keep the promise of safety you give to your loved ones. For more ways to protect your home and family please contact:

National Fire Protection Association

Department of Public Education
One Batterymarch Park
Quincy, MA 02269-9101

National Safety Council

1121 Spring Lake Drive
Itasca, IL 60143-3201

This safety message brought to you by the National Safety Council and the membership of the American Architectural Manufacturers Association, the National Wood Window and Door Association, and the Screen Manufacturers Association.

**Family Home Visiting
(FHV)**[Home Page](#)[What's New](#)[Contact Us](#)[Evaluation](#)[Funding & Financial
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Window Safety and Window Fall Prevention

Window safety is an important issue year-round, but spring and summer are excellent times to share information with parents and caregivers about preventing falls from windows. For instance, window screens are not designed to keep children from falling through them. Keep furniture, or anything children can use for climbing, away from windows. Children may use these objects to climb to an open window and fall.

[Window Safety Resources](#) - here you can find links to quality and easy to understand information on window safety and what you can do to prevent falls from windows.



- ▶ [News Release \(July 6, 2010\) from the U.S. Consumer Product and Safety Commission: CPSC urges parents and caregivers to consider safety before opening windows](#)
- ▶ [2009 Window Safety Program Legislative Report \(PDF: 2.13MB/15 pages\)](#)
- ▶ [News Release \(April 21, 2008\) from the MDH: With warmer weather, health officials urge parents to check window safety](#)

Window Safety Education Advisory Committee, 2008

[Window Safety Education Advisory Committee Meeting Agenda \(May 8, 2008\)](#)

[Share This](#)**Spotlight**

[Window Safety and Window Fall Prevention](#)

Spread the word about text4baby, a new resource for pregnant women and new moms.

[New 2010 Federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program Updates](#)

Home Safety Checklist

Do you know how safe your home is for your baby or young children?
Use this checklist to help you spot what parts of your home are safe and where you can make it safer.

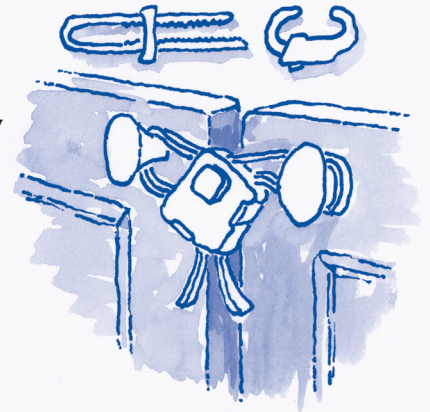
1 Safe Sleep

- Is your baby always placed on his/her back to sleep?
- Is your baby sleeping alone in a crib-type bed for nighttime and naps at home and away from home?
- Have you checked your baby's bed to make sure there are no broken or missing crib slats? Crib slats must be no more than $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches apart (size of the top of a pop can).
- Is the crib mattress firm and fitted snugly inside the crib (no extra room around edges)?
- Is your baby's crib empty of pillows, comforters, stuffed toys, bumper pads and other soft items?



3 Safe Storage

- Are there safety latches or locks on cabinets and drawers that contain potentially dangerous items? These items include:
 - Vitamins
 - Cigarettes
 - Plastic bags
 - Matches and lighters
 - Knives, scissors, razors blades, and other sharp objects
 - Cleaning supplies, pesticides, and other poisonous materials – keep these in their original containers
 - Guns and ammunition – must be stored separately
 - Medications, including over-the-counter medicines



Remember: Child-resistant packaging is not child proof.

2 Bathroom

- When your child is in the bathtub, is an adult always present?
- Is your hot water heater set to never go above 120°F?
- When you run your child's bathwater, do you test the temperature first with your wrist or elbow?
- Are there non-skid strips or a mat on the bottom of the bathtub?

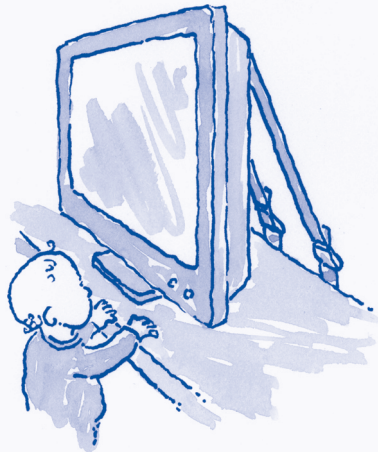
4 Kitchen

- Are small appliances in the kitchen (coffee maker, toaster) and bathroom (hairdryer, curling iron) unplugged and put away? If they cannot be stored in a cabinet or drawer, push them to the back of the counter.
- Are back burners on the stovetop used for cooking?
- Are pot handles turned toward the back of the stove?

5 Around the House

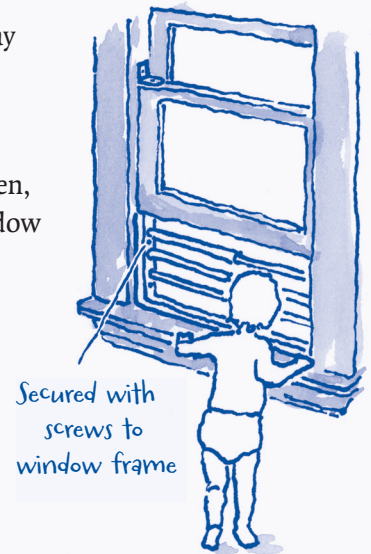
- Are the MN Poison Center phone number (1-800-222-1222) and other emergency contacts posted near all of your telephones, programmed in your cell phone or in an obvious location in your home? It is not necessary to keep syrup of ipecac in your home. In case of poisoning, always call the poison center and the experts there will advise you on what to do.
- Are small toys and objects that your baby could choke on out of reach and picked up off the floor?
- Are working carbon monoxide detectors installed within 10 feet of each room used for sleeping? Carbon monoxide detectors should be tested monthly and the batteries changed every year.
- Are working smoke detectors placed in each sleeping room as well as in the hallways outside the sleeping rooms? Smoke detectors should be tested monthly and the batteries changed every year.
- Is everyone living in your home aware of an emergency exit plan in case of a fire?
- Is your home smoke-free (no one smokes inside your home)?

- Are heavy or unstable pieces of furniture, such as TVs, entertainment centers, and bookshelves, anchored to the floor or secured to the wall?



- Are safety/baby gates installed at the top and bottom of all stairs?

- Are there shock prevention plugs or covers on all unused electrical outlets?
- Are the windows in your house or apartment child-safe? Things to do:
 - Move furniture away from windows.
 - Keep windows, especially those reachable by children, locked or have window guards or stops to prevent them from being open more than four inches.
- Are electrical cords in good condition (not frayed)? Arrange the cords so they are out of your child's reach.



- Are you keeping your child safe from lead poisoning?
 - Peeling paint or paint dust on walls and windows can have lead if your home was built before 1978.
 - Certain folk remedies may contain lead.
- Are the pull cords for window blinds or draperies out of children's reach? If cords for blinds or draperies are looped, cut them to create two short cords.

6 In the Car

- Are age-appropriate child safety seats properly installed and used when children are riding in motor vehicles?
- Does everyone wear seatbelts (or ride in an age-appropriate, properly installed child safety seat) while riding in motor vehicles?



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