

# facts on

## For More Information

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## The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute is supported by:

Government of Saskatchewan  
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## Preventing Injuries

### Understanding the Difference Between Injuries and Accidents

“Accident” is a word used to describe common situations that seem to occur without a cause. In many cases, these situations result in injuries. When the word “accident” is used to describe these situations, most people assume that the injury happened due to fate or chance. However, when the situation is investigated, the cause can clearly be determined. Once a cause is known, several steps can be taken to reduce the risk of injury in the future.

Many people, however, do not know the steps to take to reduce risk of injuries. To protect children, it is important for everyone to understand that injuries are NOT “accidents”. Injuries are predictable and preventable.

### Injuries

- Injuries are the leading cause of death for Saskatchewan children and youth from 1 to 19 years of age and result in more deaths than all other causes combined.
- Injuries to all age groups cost Saskatchewan over \$750 million in direct and indirect costs.
- Injuries cause 63% of all deaths to children and youth from 1 to 19 years of age in Saskatchewan.
- Every four and a half days in Saskatchewan, a child dies from an injury and 38 more are hospitalized.

There are two types of injuries: unintentional and intentional. Unintentional injuries are often referred to as “accidents” because no one is trying to inflict harm. Intentional injuries are the result of acts of violence such as suicide attempts, rape and assaults.

### Causes of Injuries

The cause of an injury and why the injury happened are not the same. If a child breaks an arm falling down a flight of stairs, the injury was caused by the fall. Why the injury occurred, however, can be the result of many other factors, such as:

- an object left on the stairs that caused the child to trip
- a baby gate was not in place to keep the child off the stairs
- the child may not have been adequately supervised

It is often assumed that the injury is the result of a person making a bad decision or taking unnecessary risks. While it is important to take a person’s actions into account, the physical (ie: baby gate or object on the stairs) and social environments (ie: improper supervision) must also be considered.

### Injury Prevention Strategies

In order to prevent injuries, strategies must address the people’s behavior as well as the physical and social environment in which injuries occur. There are four types of strategies that can be used to reduce the risk of injury:

1. **Education** focuses on raising awareness and providing information so that people can make informed decisions to reduce their risk of injury. Education should focus on changing attitudes and developing skills to increase a person’s ability to act safely.
2. **Technological** Advances provide safer equipment and safety devices.

3. **Regulations** are often enacted by government departments which have the authority to govern the manufacture, sale and/or use of products. These regulations can require that safety devices be included in new products.
4. **Legislation** is an important component of injury prevention. Most people are law-abiding; therefore, most people will obey safety laws even if they do not fully agree with them. All levels of government have a responsibility to serve and protect the public. Governments can enact laws that will have an impact on reducing injuries.

#### Active or Passive Strategies

Injury control strategies can be either active or passive. Whether a strategy is active or passive depends on whether a person has to do something in order to be safe. If a strategy is active, people must do something to protect themselves such as buckling up a seat belt or putting on a bicycle helmet. Driver and passenger-side airbags in vehicles are passive strategies because people are automatically protected.

#### Compulsory or Voluntary Strategies

Strategies can also be compulsory or voluntary. Compulsory measures are those required by law or regulation such as helmet laws for motorcyclists. Voluntary measures are those that people can choose to do or not to do such as putting a lock on a medicine cabinet or taking a CPR course.

Passive compulsory strategies have been shown to be the most effective, because they do not require any action by the person who is being protected. The effectiveness of active voluntary measures, on the other hand, depends on individuals behaving in certain ways.

#### Information for this fact sheet was adapted from:

*The Economic Burden of Injury in Canada, Smartrisk, 2009.*

*Canadian Injury Prevention and Control Curriculum, 2003.*

*Child & Youth Injury in Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Prevention Institute, 2002.*

*Saskatchewan Comprehensive Injury Surveillance Report, 1995-2005, Revised 2008.*

#### Examples of Active, Passive, Voluntary and Compulsory Injury Prevention Strategies

	Active	Passive
Voluntary	Taking a driver safety training course	Purchasing a vehicle with an excellent safety rating
Compulsory	Seatbelt and child safety restraint safety laws	Car manufacturer regulations requiring air bags

**All injury prevention strategies have a role to protect our children, our families and each of us from injury. The most important first step in injury prevention is to raise awareness that injuries are predictable and preventable.**