

Child safety on farms

Information for parents and caregivers

Farms are not only where families and young children live, they are also a complex work place. Whilst living on, or visiting a farm can be very exciting for toddlers and young children under 5 years of age, it can also be dangerous if extra care is not taken to keep them safe.

Young children have a natural curiosity which leads them to explore and investigate, but they do not recognise potentially dangerous and hazardous situations. For those who live on, or visit farms, this can be an added challenge for parents. One of the tragedies of child deaths and injuries on farms is that, in most instances, the injuries happen whilst young children are in the care of parents or relatives.

Different farms have different safety issues, but the major child safety concerns are:

- Drowning in dams, creeks, troughs, and waterways.
- Vehicles and large machinery runovers, rollovers and entanglement.
- Motor bikes (two wheeled) and quad bikes (four wheeled).
- Horses and other farm animals.

Approximately one quarter of child deaths occurring on farms are visitors. The following strategies will help keep young children safer on farms.

Close and active supervision

This is especially important for children under 5 years of age. 'Hold hands' with toddlers if out and about on the farm, especially near water, vehicles, machinery or animals.

A safe and secure place to play

It is important to provide a securely fenced house yard or safe play area that provides a barrier between young children and farm hazards – much like a pool fence does.

Self closing gates with child resistant latches help to slow down toddlers in their efforts to slip away. Make sure there are no foot holes for climbing and that the fence is 1.2 to 1.5 metres high.

It is easier to supervise young children if the main playing area in the yard is clearly visible from inside the house.

Have explicit family rules

- Play in the safe play area, unless an adult can actively supervise them on the property.
- Don't go near farm animals, chemicals, vehicles, farm equipment or dams, without an adult present.

- Always wear seatbelts and restraints in cars, utes, and trucks – on every trip, no matter how short a distance.
- Always wear helmets when riding bikes, motor bikes and horses, and never have children under five years of age ride without an adult present.
- Do not ride on tractors, quad bikes or on the back of utes or trucks.

It is important for parents and caregivers to realise that young children will not always remember, understand, or follow rules, so they cannot be relied upon to do so consistently. However, given time, gentle reinforcement, and good role models, they will develop safe behaviours.

Useful resources

Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety
www.aghealth.org.au/

Farm Safe Australia Inc. www.farmsafe.org.au

SafeWork SA. 1998. Farm Safety Guide. www.safework.sa.gov.au/contentPages/docs/empFarmSafetyGuide.pdf

Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit. 2008. Preventing unintentional farm injury. Hazard. 68. Spring. Monash University Accident Research Centre. www.monash.edu.au/muarc/VISU/hazard/haz68.pdf

A specific child safety on rural properties checklist can be downloaded from www.aghealth.org.au

For more information, contact:

Kidsafe SA Inc.
Women's and Children's Hospital
72 King William Rd,
North Adelaide SA 5006
Phone: (08) 8161 6318
Email: sa@kidsafe.org.au
Website: www.kidsafesa.com.au

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