

More Kids Being Hurt by Falling Furniture

Researcher calls for parental diligence and new safety regulations

By Jennifer Thomas

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MONDAY, May 4 (HealthDay News) -- It was the scariest moment of Charlene Stevenson's life as a mother.

Last March, her 2-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter were playing in her bedroom while she got dressed in the bathroom.

Stevenson heard a crash. She looked up to see a 60-pound TV and a dresser lying on top of her daughter. Her son, Michael, was lying nearby, crying but otherwise motionless. Blood was trickling from his ear.

Her daughter suffered only minor injuries. But the TV had landed on her son's head, fracturing his skull in two places. The injury damaged his hearing and injured the nerve that controls facial expressions on his left side.

"I was 25 feet from them, and it happened so fast," said Stevenson, a Plain City, Ohio, mother of five children ages 8 months to 16 years. "When I looked at my dresser, I would never have thought it would have fallen over."

Between 1990 and 2007, an estimated 264,200 U.S. children were treated in hospital emergency departments for injuries caused by furniture tipping, about 15,000 each year, according to a study published in the May online issue of *Clinical Pediatrics*.

About 300 children died of their injuries.

And since the early 1990s, the number of children injured by falling TVs, shelves and dressers has risen 41 percent, according to the study's analysis of data collected by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

The researchers said they aren't sure what has led to the increase. Possibilities might include changes in furniture or TV design or more furniture in homes, or the statistical change could stem from parents taking children to a hospital more readily than they did years ago.

"What we do know is there's a trend we need to pay attention to," said Dr. Gary A. Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, and senior author of the study. "Forty children a day are rushed to an emergency department because a heavy piece of furniture fell on them."

About 75 percent of the injuries recorded in the study were to children 6 years of age and younger. Boys were at greater risk than girls, accounting for 56 percent of those injured. The most common type of injury was to the head and neck.

The most common culprit was a falling TV, which caused about half of the injuries.

Smith said it appears that parents either aren't hearing or aren't heeding warnings on product safety.

"This trend demonstrates the inadequacy of current prevention strategies and underscores the need for increased prevention efforts," he said.

To reduce risks, parents should put TVs on stands that are low to the ground. TVs and furniture should be attached to the wall with safety straps, L-brackets or even Velcro that can be bought at home improvement stores. If you're not sure how to do it, Smith said, ask a salesperson for help.

Purchasing furniture with wide legs or with solid bases, installing drawer stops to keep drawers in chests from pulling out all the way and placing heavy items on shelves close to the floor also help prevent tip-overs.

And don't put items tempting to kids, such as toys and remote controls, on top of furniture or the TV as young children may try to scale the furniture to retrieve them.

The long-term solution, Smith said, is passing legislation to require that TV and furniture manufacturers include safety attachments at the time of sale.

Since her son's accident, Charlene Stevenson has taken such precautions in her home. Michael, now 3, still has permanent hearing loss of 10 percent in his left ear, but has otherwise recovered.

"If I can help one child not to have a TV fall on him, I'll tell anyone who will listen," Stevenson said. "We got really lucky, and we know it. It could have killed him."

More information

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has more on [preventing injury from tip-overs](#).

SOURCES: Charlene Stevenson, Plain City, Ohio; Gary A. Smith, M.D., Dr.P.H., director, Center for Injury Research and Policy, Nationwide Children's Hospital, Columbus, Ohio; May 2009, Clinical Pediatrics, online

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