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U.S. Sets Rigorous New Safety Standards for Cribs

By MEREDITH MELNICK Tuesday, June 28, 2011

As of Tuesday, it is illegal to sell a crib in the U.S. that does not meet strict new federal safety standards. That includes sales of all secondhand cribs, which are typically found on sites like eBay and Craigslist, as well as the retail sale of any new crib that was manufactured before the new regulations were put in place.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC) new safety standards address the major design flaws that have killed or injured so many infants in recent years, including the so-called "drop-side." This design allows the side of the crib to be raised or lowered, letting parents reach into the crib more easily. But the hinges on the movable sides too often break, creating dangerous gaps in which babies can become stuck or strangled.

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Drop-side cribs are now banned altogether, but other, sturdier crib models are also being put through the stringent safety tests, which are designed to simulate real-world wear and tear more accurately. The Chicago *Tribune's* Patricia Callahan [reports](#):

A new battery of tests will better simulate the long life of a crib, finding screws that come loose, mattress supports that separate and slats that break. Each of those hazards can create a deadly gap that babies' bodies can slip through. When their heads get caught, they can hang to death or otherwise suffocate.

The old rules allowed manufacturers to tighten screws between different tests. Under the new rules, the crib has to pass all of the tests without any adjustments along the way. In one test, the crib is pushed repeatedly in eight different directions for a total of 72,000 movements to simulate wear and tear. Separately, a 45-pound weight is dropped on the mattress support 750 times.

The CPSC has also improved at-home assembly instructions to ensure that parents build cribs correctly. Unsound assembly was a contributor to the deaths of many babies, the CPSC found.

The tricky part now will be finding a crib that meets the new standards. The CPSC says that most cribs currently in American homes probably don't meet the new safety requirements and recommends that parents who can afford it buy a new crib that does.

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However, even at the store, there's no way for parents to know from the packaging of a crib that it has passed the stricter

new safety tests. Manufacturers are required to supply retailers with a certificate proving that their products have been tested under the new standards, but retailers are not required to display the documentation. But parents may specifically request to see those certificates either from the store or from the manufacturer directly.

The new safety requirements are being applauded by parents and consumer advocacy groups. The risks of unsound cribs are high: a recent study found that **every day 26 babies and toddlers are injured** in cribs, playpens and bassinets in the U.S. That amounts to 9,500 injuries per year, a number that does not include the 100 deaths that also occur each year — harms directly related to an item that is supposed to be, above all, safe.

"Cribs are unique among other children's products. Parents expect to be able to place a child in a crib and know when they walk away that child will be safe. We need to hold cribs to much higher safety standards as opposed to baby equipment you are supposed to only use with parental supervision," Gary Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, **told** Healthland's Bonnie Rochman in February.

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