

...a pound of cure

Baby walkers: Let's uphold the ban

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As a Trauma Centre that cares for a large volume of significant trauma cases and advocates for the needs of children, The Montreal Children's Hospital is very concerned with the Federal Minister of Health's announcement to establish a review board to reconsider the April 2004 decision to ban the sale, import and advertisement of baby walkers under the "Hazardous Products Act".

Some manufacturers or distributors say they can prevent falls down stairs by increasing the width to 36" and having gripping mechanisms to stop the walkers from going over the edge of a step. While falls are a significant cause of injuries, they are not the only mechanism.

When infants and toddlers are in the walkers, they become mobile and can reach hot or sharp objects that would otherwise be out of reach. Some of the serious injuries sustained by young children include traumatic brain injuries, burns and fractures. It does not make sense for infants and toddlers, who do not have the cognitive abilities to determine environmental risks, to be on wheels.

Supervision is essential, but young children can move quite quickly in walkers, which gives parents a false sense of security. It makes more sense that walkers continue to be replaced by activity centres that are stationary, have a wide base of support and eliminate the mobility factor.

In 2003, SafeKids Canada reported that every year 1000 babies are treated in ERs across the country for walker related trauma. We strongly supported and participated in their campaign to ban all walkers in Canada. Needless to say, we were quite pleased when Canada became the first country to impose such a ban in April 2004. Why reopen the discussion?

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Parents are now aware of the danger, which is why we urge the government to uphold the ban on walkers! Trauma is the leading cause of death and disability in the pediatric and adolescent population. Why would the government want to undo something positive that demonstrates leadership in an important aspect of child health? ■

Between 1992 and 2002, we treated approximately 300 infants and toddlers for injuries related to walkers, an average of 30 per year, many of which were quite serious.

Over the past 3 years, since the campaign in 2003 and the ban in 2004, we have treated a total of 12 children, considerably less than the previous yearly averages of 30.

