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## Injuries associated with baby walkers

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The Injury and Child Maltreatment Section, Health Surveillance and Epidemiology Division of the Centre for Healthy Human Development at Health Canada, with the cooperation and support of the Product Safety Bureau, Healthy Environments and Consumer Safety Branch, decided to undertake this survey to obtain a better understanding of the frequency and extent of injuries associated with baby walkers in Canada by surveying the experience of Canadian paediatricians treating such injuries, both in hospitals and private practices.

The survey question was designed to focus on children less than 18 months of age, as this is considered to be the target age for use of these products. This age limit excluded injuries to older (walking) children incidentally interacting with (and being injured by) a walker more commonly used by a younger child or sibling. The limit was also intended to exclude reports related to walkers used as assistive devices by older children with mobility challenges.

A total of 1,214 paediatricians returned the survey, representing an overall return rate of 53.4%. However, 12 forms were blank with no response to the survey question, and one could not be categorized. This reduced the number of answered forms to 1,201 for a response rate of 52.8%. Of the returned forms, 84 were received from paediatricians who recalled treating one or more patients less than 18 months of age for injuries associated with baby walkers. Fourteen physicians indicated that due to the nature or subspecialty of their practice, they would not have treated injuries of this type during the past year.

In all, 7.1% (95% CI 5.6-8.6) of respondents reported treating one or more injuries related to baby walkers during the past year. The breakdown summary of 'injuries seen in the past year' indicates that respondents treated a minimum of 132 children under the age of 18 months for injuries associated with baby walkers. Many paediatricians included comments with their response. Nineteen physicians indicated that they specifically counselled parents against the use of baby walkers. Only one respondent advocated their use by remarking that he/she did not have a problem with a properly supervised walker being used in a safe environment.

### Conclusions

Overall, the findings of this survey offer a profile of the experience of Canadian paediatricians in treating injuries associated with baby walkers. In spite of more than a decade of effort to discourage their sale and use, baby walkers continue to be used in Canada, and ensuing injuries occur. Among paediatricians responding to this survey, 7.1% had treated one or more children less than 18 months of age for injuries associated with baby walkers in the past year.

Clearly, these injuries are both needless and preventable. To curb future incidents, in the months ahead, Health Canada will review options and work collaboratively with the Canadian Paediatric Society's Injury Prevention Committee, which is currently preparing a statement on baby walker safety, to consider the public health implications of the survey findings. In addition, information on baby walkers will be made available on the CPS Web site for parents.

### Principal investigator

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