

# Shopping Carts and Children: A Dangerous Mix



A safety seat like this one protects children from falls while riding in shopping carts.

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It's Saturday afternoon, and I'm in the commissary. As I round the second aisle and head toward the canned soups and sauces, I see a toddler climbing all over the seat of a shopping cart. He's even playing with the unfastened safety strap as though it's a toy.

I move my cart closer in case his dad wanders too far away. At any moment, I expect the child to pitch headfirst onto the floor. Eventually, the child becomes so rambunctious his dad fastens the restraint, and I breathe easier as I continue my shopping.

On the next aisle, I catch a glimpse of a mom with her infant strapped into a detachable car seat-infant carrier, suspended precariously on top of another shopping cart.

I usually say something to parents when I find these unsafe practices, and I usually get told to mind my own business. As a safety professional and parent, though, I feel it's my responsibility to caution people when their children's safety is compromised.

The commissary system has done an outstanding job of ensuring shopping carts are designed to reduce tipping and are equipped with safety straps and infant carriers. Yet, some children still are at risk. Why? Because a small percentage of parents aren't aware of the hazards related to shopping carts.

In case you're wondering why I'm concerned about children and shopping carts, consider these statistics collected from U.S. emergency rooms (not including private physicians' offices or urgent-care centers):

- More than 23,000 children ages 14 and under are treated annually for injuries related to shopping carts. Sixty percent of these injuries are from falls, which occur because children ages 5 and under are unrestrained. Seventy-four percent of these injuries are to the head and neck.

- Sixty-five percent of the children injured are males.

- Children under the age of 5 and all those left unattended are at the highest risk of shopping-cart injuries.

- 3,900 injuries occur annually when children run into or strike their bodies against grocery carts.

- Eight percent of all injuries occur when a cart tips over. The primary ages of these children are 1 and younger.

What can you do to prevent your child from becoming a shopping-cart statistic? Plenty!

- Always use the safety strap to restrain your child in the cart, and stay close to it.

- Don't strap personal baby carriers or child seats to the cart. Use a cart designed with a baby carrier.

- Never let your child stand up in a cart, ride on its frame, or push or steer it.

- Once you put an item in a shopping cart, don't let your child try to get it. ❗

*The author was assigned to NAS Sigonella when she wrote this article. She obtained these facts from the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, a monthly journal for physicians and other health-care professionals. Some information also came from emergency rooms across the country.*