

Australasian Association of Parenting & Child Health

INFANT CHILD CARRY EQUIPMENT

AAPCH

The Australian Association of Parenting and Child Health (AAPCH) is an international organisation of key agencies in Australia and New Zealand providing early parenting education, guidance and support for professionals working with families and young children. AAPCH is committed to optimising the physical, social and emotional health and wellbeing of children.

AIM

This position paper seeks to provide guidance on the developmentally appropriate and safe use of infant/child carry equipment. The paper seeks to address the perspective of both the infant and their caregiver, highlighting the important role caregivers play in supporting the emotional regulation and growth of the infant including reassurance in interpreting the world around them.

DEFINITION

This position paper focuses on the developmentally appropriate use of infant/child carry equipment; that is equipment that is used to take the infant/child out into the world. This includes equipment such as prams, strollers, pouches and backpacks. Other items such as car seats are outside the scope of this position paper unless they are being used to carry the infant while the parent is walking. The term 'infant' in this paper is inclusive of infants aged 0 – 12 months and young children transported using infant/child carry equipment.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The following principles are applicable across all infant/child carry equipment unless otherwise stated.

1. Infants require support in order to regulate their emotional state and responses to the world around them. This is best supported through the infant being able to see the face of their caregiver or able to easily have infant initiated physical contact with their carer.
2. Parents are encouraged to engage with their infant by having the infant facing them (under 12 months), talking with them and reassuring their infant as they engage with the world around them.
3. In situations where parents have only forward-facing equipment available (i.e. certain types of prams or backpacks), parents are encouraged to ensure they provide regular interaction with their child to reassure them of the parent's

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presence and availability. Parents are also encouraged to avoid overwhelming stimulus such as lengthy periods of time in busy environments when their infant/child is forward facing.

4. Infant/child carry equipment must be appropriate to the development of the infant. Infants must be physically and emotionally ready and developmentally able to remain safe when being transported using infant/child carry equipment
5. Infant/child carry equipment should be approved by the relevant Australian/New Zealand safety standards
6. Infant/child carry equipment must be ergonomically safe for the caregiver to use.

INFANT SAFETY

- The equipment must be appropriate to the physical and emotional development of the infant.
- Caregivers are encouraged to consider using equipment that enables the infant to face their caregiver including prams that face the caregiver and pouches in which the infant faces inwards.
- It may be appropriate to cover the pram for safety reasons such as sunlight and insects. Covering the pram to reduce stimuli for the infant to fall asleep is not necessary. By seeing the caregiver, the infant is able to receive reassurance and support to regulate their emotional state.
- Any covering of a pram must ensure substantial air-flow for the infant and ensure a comfortable and safe temperature for the infant to avoid overheating.
- The use of slings to carry infants is not recommended. Infants may not have the developmental capacity to reposition themselves safely to ensure they can breathe freely. Infants under 4 months and those born premature or of low birth weight are at higher risk of blocked airways when carried in slings. The positioning of the infant's legs in slings may also be associated with hip dysplasia.
- The importance of appropriate positioning to ensure the infant can breathe freely is also applied to all other infant carrying equipment.

EQUIPMENT SAFETY

- Infant/child carry equipment should be approved by the relevant safety standards.

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- Caregivers need to take care to check the recommendations of the manufacturer including suitability for age and weight of the infant/child.
- Prams and pouches must have adequate support to enable the infant to be transported safely. Appropriate safety features are essential e.g. securely attached and complete safety harness for the infant/child, fully functioning brakes, wrist safety band to attach pram to caregiver arm, free of pinch points that might trap fingers.
- Any infant/child wearing device should be comfortable to both the caregiver and their infant/child and provide ready access for interaction and attendance to the infant.

FURTHER INFORMATION & WEBSITES

- Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (2013), 'Keeping Baby Safe – a guide to infant and nursery products'
<https://www.productsafety.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/972363>
- Better Health Channel (2016) -
<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/babies-and-safety>
- Choice (2014) 'Baby carrier and sling buying guide' - <https://www.choice.com.au/babies-and-kids/baby-transport/carriers-and-slings/buying-guides/baby-carriers-and-slings>
- International Hip Dysplasia Institute (2012) - <http://hipdysplasia.org/developmental-dysplasia-of-the-hip/prevention/baby-carriers-seats-and-other-equipment/>
- International Hip Dysplasia Institute (2012) - <http://hipdysplasia.org/baby-wearing/>
- Standards Australia - <http://www.standards.org.au/Pages/default.aspx>
- Standards New Zealand - <https://www.standards.govt.nz/>
- SIDS and Kids website - ACCC Safety Alert: Baby Slings (2011) -
http://www.sidsandkids.org/wp-content/uploads/ACCC-safety-alert_Slings-0511.pdf
- Raising Children Network (2016) 'Prams and strollers: safety guide' -
http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/safety_for_prams_strollers.html/context/573
- Raising Children Network (2016) 'Baby carriers, slings and backpacks: safety guide' -
http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/baby_slings_carriers_safety.html/context/573
- Russell, N. (2015), 'Babywearing in the Age of the Internet', Journal of Family Issues, Vol 36 (9), pp. 1130-1153.
- Zeedyk, S. (2008), 'What's life in a baby buggy like?: The impact of buggy orientation on parent-infant interaction and infant stress', University of Dundee, Scotland.

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