

Illness and Death

The vast majority of children in the United States go through the physical changes just described and reach adulthood without serious illness or death. However, some do not. In the United States accidents are the leading cause of death in young children, followed by cancer and cardiovascular disease (National Center for Health Statistics, 2018). In addition to motor vehicle accidents, other accidental deaths in children involve drowning, falls, and poisoning.

Children's safety is influenced not only by their own skills and safety-related behaviors but also by characteristics of their family and home, school and peers, and community (Onders & others, 2018; Saunders & others, 2017). Figure 2 describes steps that can be taken in each of these contexts to enhance children's safety and prevent injury (Sleet & Mercy, 2003).

One major danger to children is parental smoking (Merianos, Dixon, & Mahabee-Gittens, 2017). An estimated 22 percent of children and adolescents in the United States are exposed to tobacco smoke in the home. An increasing number of studies indicate that children are at risk for

health problems when they live in homes in which a parent smokes (Hatoun & others, 2018; Miyahara & others, 2017; Pugmire, Sweeting, & Moore, 2017; Rosen & others, 2018). Children exposed to tobacco smoke in the home are more likely to develop wheezing and asthma than are children in homes where no one smokes (Vo & others, 2017). One study revealed that exposure to secondhand smoke was related to young children's sleep problems, including sleep-disordered breathing (Yolton & others, 2010). Researchers have also found that maternal cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption when children were 5 years of age were linked to early onset of smoking in adolescence (Hayatbakhsh & others, 2013). And a recent study found that young children who were exposed to environmental tobacco smoke were more likely to engage in antisocial behavior when they were 12 years old (Pagani & others, 2017).

Although accidents and serious illnesses such as cancer are the leading causes of death among children in the United States, this is not the case in a number of other countries in the world, where many children die of preventable infectious diseases. Many of the deaths of young children around the world could be prevented by a reduction in poverty and improvements in nutrition, sanitation, education, and health services (UNICEF, 2018). High poverty rates have devastating effects on the

health of a country's young children, who are likely to experience hunger, malnutrition, illness, inadequate access to health care, unsafe water, and a lack of protection from harm (Black & others, 2017; UNICEF, 2018). In the last decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of young children who have died because HIV/AIDS was transmitted to them by their parents. Deaths of young children due to HIV/AIDS especially occur in countries with high rates of poverty and low levels of education (UNICEF, 2018).



How Would You...?

As a health-care professional, how would you talk with parents about the impact of secondhand smoke on children's health to encourage parents to stop smoking?

Many children in impoverished countries die before reaching the age of 5 from dehydration and malnutrition brought about by diarrhea.

What are some of the other main causes of death in young children around the world?
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Individual

- Development of social skills and ability to regulate emotions
- Impulse control (such as not darting out into a street to retrieve a ball)
- Frequent use of personal protection (such as bike helmets and safety seats)

Family/Home

- High awareness and knowledge of child management and parenting skills
- Frequent parent protective behaviors (such as use of child safety seats)
- Presence of home safety equipment (such as smoke alarms and cabinet locks)

School/Peers

- Promotion of home/school partnerships
- Absence of playground hazards
- Injury prevention and safety promotion policies and programs

Community

- Availability of positive activities for children and their parents
- Active surveillance of environmental hazards
- Effective prevention policies in place (such as pool fencing)

Figure 2

Characteristics That Enhance Young Children's Safety.

In each context of a child's life, steps can be taken to create conditions that enhance the child's safety and reduce the likelihood of injury.

How are the contexts listed in the figure related to Bronfenbrenner's theory?