



# Choking, Strangulation and Suffocation

**KEEPING OUR TAMARIKI SAFE FROM CHOKING WITH  
MOTHER OF TWO, SHANIA BERRYMAN**



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# Haere mai

Nau mai, mauri, afio mai, susū mai, welcome.

Choking and strangulation injuries are less common than other injuries but tend to be fatal. When oxygen flow to the lungs is reduced or blocked completely, brain damage can occur in as little as four to six minutes. A serious choking, suffocation or strangulation injury can affect a child for the rest of their life, both physically and mentally, often causing irreversible brain and organ damage. Therefore, it is important to protect tamariki and their precious kete.

Tamariki have small airways that can be blocked by objects much easier than adults. They also have smaller teeth and are still learning to chew and swallow properly. This means they are at risk of swallowing and choking on food that hasn't been cut into small enough pieces. The danger is even greater because their small lungs are not very good at shifting or clearing objects that get caught in their airways.

This toolkit is designed for anyone who engages with whānau. It brings together a range of resources to help protect our tamariki from injury.

## **This toolkit includes:**

- Key safety and first aid messages for whānau
- Video resources and social tiles from our campaign to share
- Child choking prevention resources, research and policy
- Links to information from other organisations



# Who we are

## Safekids Aotearoa

**"Ko te tamaiti te pūtake o te ao."**

The child is at the heart of all that we do.

Our mission is to reduce the incidence and severity of unintentional injuries to children aged 0 to 14 years. Our vision is that every child in Aotearoa New Zealand enjoys a childhood free from traumatic, unintentional injury.

## About Our Tamariki Injury Prevention Campaign

This campaign is centered around choking, strangulation and suffocation through whānau story with a specific focus on choking. In this campaign we share a video from Shania Berryman who reflects on her journey of becoming a young māmā. She also recalls a frightening choking incident involving her young daughter, Anuheā. We also provide tips and resources to help support you to keep tamariki safe from choking when feeding and around objects. It is our mission to protect our tamariki from unintentional choking, strangulation and suffocation injuries in Aotearoa.



## Shania Berryman

Shania Berryman is a māmā of two beautiful tamariki Anuheah (3) and Keahi (7 months). Both she and her partner, Marcel Hellesoe are accomplished Waka Ama athletes having traveled the world to compete.

As a child Shania Berryman grew up playing multiple sports before focusing on Waka Ama during high school. Shania says “there’s nothing like being on the water,” where she describes feeling connected to her ancestors who paddled before her. “For Māori people it’s really important for us to be connected not only to the water but also the land and our environment.” Shania says that the reason she has continued to do Waka Ama for so long is because of the whānau atmosphere and inclusivity of the sport which allows people of all ages to participate.

For Shania the dangers of choking were evident while feeding her daughter Anuheah who was one at the time. While feeding Anuheah pureed bananas and strawberries she noticed that something was amiss when her daughter had a blank expression and seemed unresponsive. Shania at the time wasn’t sure of how to best help her daughter and instead called for her partner. Marcel quickly held Anuheah face down, supporting her jaw and slapped Anuheah’s back dislodging a small lump of banana which had become stuck in her airway. This incident prompted Shania to attend a first aid course so she would be better prepared should this ever happen again.

# Key messages

## REMEMBER

Very young children of this 0-12 months age group have a windpipe with a diameter slightly bigger than a large straw.

### FOOD WITH SKINS/LEAVES

Tamariki find it hard to chew food with skins, as they can seal their airways. Some foods with skins include sausages, cheerios, chicken, stone fruit and spinach. To prevent choking, remove the skins (and stones from fruit) and cut up so food is as small as your child's smallest fingernail.

### WHAT TO DO: FOOD

A safe way for babies and young children to eat and drink is while seated and supervised.

### SMALL-ROUND FOOD

Small round or oval foods are more likely to put our tamariki at risk of choking. Some of these include grapes, berries and raisins. These can be quartered or chopped smaller. Things such as peas can be mashed with a fork and raisins can be soaked to soften.

### SMALL HARD FOOD

Some foods are more likely to put our tamariki at risk of choking. Some of these foods include nuts, raw apple, carrot and celery. Before serving, finely grate carrot, celery and apple or cook till soft before giving to tamariki. Giving nuts to tamariki should also be avoided till age five.

# Key messages

## BUTTON BATTERIES

Button batteries will severely burn the throat if swallowed and also pose a choking risk. To keep tamariki safe, put items with button batteries out of sight and out of reach and keep loose batteries locked away. As an extra precaution we suggest putting some duct tape over the TV controller.



## WINDOW CORDS

Make sure window cords and strings are tied up and out of reach. They are a risk for young children, so keep beds away from window cords too.



## TOYS

Before you buy a toy, check that it is right for your child's age. Remember, the smaller the child, the bigger the toy is. If a toy is small enough to fit into a toilet roll it's too small for a child less than 3 years.



## BOTTLE FEEDING

We suggest feeding your baby before they go to sleep rather than letting them fall asleep with a bottle. Babies who fall asleep while bottle-feeding or with the teat in their mouth can draw liquid into their lungs and inhale or choke on it.



# First aid: Babies up to 1 year



If the baby is unconscious, do CPR. If the baby is conscious, follow these steps:

1. Call for help.
2. Hold the baby down lengthwise on your arm or knee.
3. Firmly support the head by holding the jaw.
4. Give 5 back slaps between the shoulder blades with the heel of your hand – not too hard – to create an artificial cough.
5. If the obstruction still hasn't come out, turn the baby over face up with head lower than the trunk (or body).
6. Give 5 chest compressions in the same place as for CPR, but at a slower rate (1 every 3 seconds).
7. Only remove the object if you can see it. Do not try to fish for it as you may push the object down further.
8. Continue back slaps and chest thrusts until the object comes out.

If your child is injured you can find out more about ACC support at [www.acc.co.nz/im-injured](http://www.acc.co.nz/im-injured). ACC Claims: 0800 101 996 or email [claims@acc.co.nz](mailto:claims@acc.co.nz).

For detailed references on the data and information contained in this card and to download additional copies visit <https://starship.org.nz/safekids/reference-cards>



# First aid: Children over 1 year



If the child is unconscious, do CPR.

If they are coughing or having difficulty breathing, encourage the child to cough.

Do not do anything further at this stage. If the airway is completely obstructed and the child is conscious but not breathing:

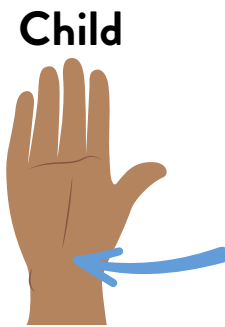
1. Call for help.
2. Stand to the side of and slightly behind the child. Give up to 5 slaps between the shoulder blades with the heel of your hand, firmly enough to try to clear the obstruction.
3. If the obstruction has not come out of their mouth, wrap your arms around the child's chest and grasp one of your fists with the other hand.
4. Give up to 5 quick inward thrusts.
5. If the obstruction still has not come out, repeat the sequence of 5 back slaps followed by 5 inward thrusts until the obstruction comes out of their mouth. The aim is to clear the obstruction with each new back slap or chest thrust, rather than necessarily giving all 5.

If the child becomes unconscious, follow the basic life support steps and perform CPR on page 8.

If you can't remove the object in these ways, do mouth-to-nose (or mouth-to-mouth) breathing on the child until help arrives

# CPR instructions

The CPR advice is from the KidsHealth website and the Basic Life Support Flow Chart. The Basic Life Support Flow Chart is developed by the New Zealand Resuscitation Council and Australian Resuscitation Council. For more information see [www.nrc.org.nz](http://www.nrc.org.nz).



30 : 2



- Put the child on a firm surface.
- Place 2 fingers of one hand (for a baby) or the heel of one hand (for a child) in the centre of the chest just below the nipples.
- Push down hard and fast (compression) 30 times in about 15 seconds (push down one-third of chest depth).
- Once you have completed 30 compressions (pushes) on the chest, breathe into the baby's mouth 2 times.
- Seal your lips around the baby's mouth and nose.
- For a child over 1, you may need to breathe into their mouth and pinch their nose closed. Gently puff into the child until you see their chest rise.
- Continue with the cycle of 30 chest compressions and 2 breaths until the ambulance arrives.

# Campaign digital resources



## Whānau story with Shania Berryman

We are honoured to share this story from Shania Berryman, māmā of two beautiful tamariki Anuheā (3) and Keahi (7 months). Shania shares her story as well as a choking incident with her daughter and reflects on her learnings from the experience.

[Watch on YouTube](#)

[Watch on Facebook](#)



A safe way for children to eat is while seated and supervised.



Cut food for toddlers into tiny pieces.  
(about the size of their smallest finger nail)

## Social Tiles

These social tiles include our key messages for keeping our tamariki safe from choking when feeding and around objects.

[Download and share social tiles](#)

# Community resources

We've created educational resources that you can share with whānau around the motu. Check out our Choking and Strangulation reference card linked here. Below are some infographics from the [reference card](#) on the topic.

## THE CAUSES



### SUFFOCATION CAUSED BY CHOKING

Nearly half of all suffocation injuries are caused by choking on food and other objects, particularly for children under 1 year.



### SMALL OBJECTS

Choking from small objects such as balloons, earrings, small toy parts and button batteries.



### WINDOW CORDS & STRINGS

Strangulation injuries from window cords and strings.

## WHO IS GETTING INJURED?



### 0-4 YEARS

Account for around 90% of choking and strangulation injuries.



### BOYS

Boys are at a slightly higher risk than girls.



### MĀORI & PACIFIC

Are 1.5 times more likely to be hospitalised than other ethnicities.

## SAFETY DEVICES



- Designing, constructing and using materials for cots, folding cots and high chairs that minimise entrapment.
- Ensuring toys for under 3 year olds do not have small parts that can be pulled off or break off easily.
- Choking test tube, or toilet roll tube.

## WHERE IT HAPPENS



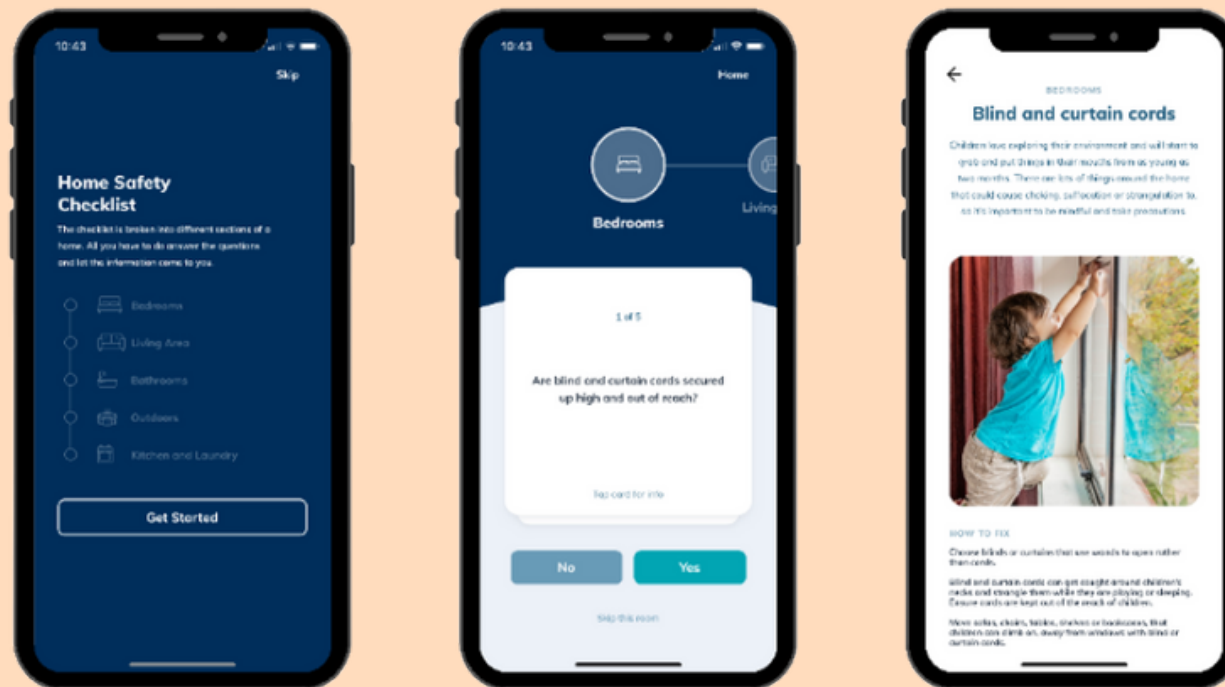
70% of choking and strangulation events requiring hospitalisations happen at home.



# Community resources - Whare Kahikā

Whare Kahikā is a free home safety app that allows users to identify potential injury risks to tamariki in their homes. The app provides educational information, solutions and links to sellers of safety devices. The app works room by room, providing questions and recommendation lists for improving the safety of each space. The app is offered in Tongan, Samoan, te reo Māori & English.

## Whare Kahikā



Click on the images on the right to download.

# Research and policy



## **Child Unintentional Deaths and Injuries in New Zealand, and Prevention Strategies**

A subsection of this report presents the data surrounding choking, suffocation and strangulation. The data shows that ages 0-4 are at the greatest risk, especially those under one. Majority of hospitalisations are made up of choking on food, followed by objects. Good practice evidence includes legislative enforcement and education.

## **Regulatory and Educational Initiatives to Prevent Food Choking Injuries in Children: An Overview of the Current Approaches**

This paper highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between safe and nutritious food. Foods that pose a choking risk can be mitigated (with rare exceptions) by ensuring they can be safely given to tamariki through the right food preparation techniques.

## **Reducing food-related choking for babies and young children at early learning services**

This advice is based on the Ministry of Health's recommendations and has been adapted for early learning services.



## Links to further information

### **Checklist for Preventing Your Baby From Choking- Kids Health**

This page provides great visual aids of the different types of food that pose a choking risk. It also offers examples of alternative ways to prepare these so they are safe to serve tamariki.

### **Choking - St Johns**

St Johns provides information on what to do if someone is choking, the signs and symptoms of choking, and the different types of airway obstructions.

### **Well Child/Tamariki Ora Health Book**

This downloadable pdf book provides parent information and health and immunisation records for tamariki aged 0-5.

### **Ministry of Health - Foods that pose a higher choking risk for children under five years**

This page provides a comprehensive breakdown of the different types of foods that pose a choking risk and provide ways to prepare these foods so they are safer to serve to tamariki.

### **Safekids WorldWide - Choking and Strangulation**

This page provides tips and further resources for preventing choking and strangulation.