



BSA SAFETY MOMENT

BUNK BEDS

SUMMARY

On average, 36,000 injuries related to bunk beds occur in the United States each year, according to Nationwide Children’s Hospital and the American Academy of Pediatrics. The head and neck are most prone to injuries due to falls from bunk beds. Our Scouting family is not immune to this risk.

GENERAL INFORMATION

What can be done to reduce the risk?

- Use guard rails on both sides of the top bunk. Gaps should be 3.5 inches or smaller to prevent strangulation. Guard rails should extend at least 5 inches above the top of the mattress on the top bunk. The photo above shows how one council recently retrofitted the bunk beds at their camp.
- Verify that the foundation of the mattress is strong and that the mattress is the correct size. Are there any weight limitations?
- Teach children how to safely climb the ladder.
- Children under age 6—or anyone with a history of sleepwalking or a fear of heights—should sleep on the lowest bed.
- Roughhousing, bouncing, or playing on the top bunk or ladder is inappropriate.
- It is preferable to place the bunk beds in the corner of the room away from ceiling fans.
- Install a night light near the ladder.
- Ladders need to be securely fastened to the bunk beds.
- Objects such as belts, scarves, neckerchiefs, or ropes that could cause a hanging need to be stored away from the bed.
- Take the bunk out of service if the ladder or beds are broken, damaged, or missing.

Many sports and outdoor retailers sell bunk-bed cots, with and without side organizers. However, these cots usually do not have safety rails and even though they aren’t as tall as home or dormitory bunk beds, injuries from falls can still happen.

Here are some safety tips for bunk-bed cots.

- If possible, install rigid safety rails on the long sides of the top bunk, at least 5 inches above the support rail. Note: This is required if the bottom of the top bunk is more than 30 inches from the floor.
- Review the manufacturer’s guidelines for weight limits on the top and bottom bunks.
- Teach all Scouts and adults how to safely get into and out of the top bunk. It is best to do this at the head or foot of the bunk. Never enter or exit the top bunk from the sides.
- Do not use the cot if the bunks are damaged.
- Do not enter or exit the bunk-bed cot at night without adequate lighting.

Bunk beds and bunk-bed cots are especially useful in sleeping quarters where the amount of space is limited. However, make sure to follow the above safety practices to help prevent injuries.

RESOURCES

- Center for Injury Research and Policy: www.nationwidechildrens.org/cirp-bunk-bed-safety
- American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org
- U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Office of Compliance: www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/pdfs/blk_media_regsumbunkbed.pdf