

FIRST 5 LA TIPS FOR PREPARING YOUNG CHILDREN FOR EARTHQUAKES

The spate of small earthquakes that has shaken Southern California in recent weeks is milder reminder of massive disasters like those seen in Haiti and Chile. A sizeable quake in a rural area of Baja California was felt here in the Southland.

First 5 LA urges parents to make special efforts to ready their youngsters for this type of natural disaster and its aftermath. Part of earthquake preparedness includes talking to young children about tremors, especially in regions where youngsters are more likely to personally experience seismic activity like the aftershocks that have rippled through Southern California.

Statistics show that young children suffer significantly higher fatality rates and are more likely than any other age group to experience emotional and physical trauma as the result of a natural disaster. For example, children in preschool settings may be more emotionally vulnerable or distressed following an earthquake because they are separated from their primary attachment figures – namely their parents – according to a report in the *Early Childhood Education Journal*.

“Special emphasis should be placed on making the living environment of babies and toddlers as safe as possible,” said Evelyn V. Martinez, executive director of First 5 LA, a child advocacy and public grant-making organization. “When you live in an earthquake zone like we do in Los Angeles County, the seriousness of being prepared cannot be overstated.”

First5 LA recommends the following earthquake preparedness tips for babies and toddlers:

- Cribs should be placed away from windows and tall, unsecured bookcases and shelves that could slide or topple.
- Have a 72-hour minimum supply of extra water, formula, bottles, food, juices, clothing, disposable diapers and baby wipes on hand.
- Also keep an extra diaper bag with the items above in your car.
- Prescribed medications should be stored where they are most likely to be accessible after an earthquake.
- Store strollers, wagons, blankets and cribs with appropriate wheels to evacuate infants, if necessary.
- Install bumper pads in cribs or bassinets to protect babies during the shaking.
- Install latches on all cupboards (not just those young children can reach) so that nothing can fall on your baby during a quake.

“By age 3 or so, children can understand what an earthquake is and how to get ready for one,” Martinez said. “Take the time to explain what causes earthquakes in terms they’ll understand and include your chil-

dren in family discussions and planning for earthquake safety.”

First 5 LA also suggests that parents conduct drills and review safety procedures every six months and show children the safest places to be in each room when an earthquake hits. Parents should make sure their youngsters’ emergency cards at preschool are up-to-date.

About First 5 LA

First 5 LA, a child advocacy and public grant-making organization was created by California voters to invest Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues to support programs for improving the lives of children from prenatal through age 5 in Los Angeles County. For more information on First 5 LA’s programs for parents and children call 1-888-347-7855 or visit www.first5la.org. ■

