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## Unintentional Injuries in a Twin Study of Preschool Children: Environmental, Not Genetic, Risk Factors

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## Abstract

**Objective** To analyze the relative contribution of latent genetic and environmental factors to differences in the injury liability of children, and to examine the association between measured socio-economic, family, and child-behavior variables and unintentional injury risk. **Methods** Unintentional injuries from birth to age 5, together with information regarding measured risk variables, were reported by mothers in a sample of 1027 same-sex twin pairs from a nationally representative 1994–1995 birth cohort. **Results** Child-specific environmental factors accounted for most of the variance (86.4%) in the likelihood of ever having an injury. When considering the risk of two or more injuries child-specific environmental factors explained 60.2% of the variance and family-wide environmental influence 39.8%. Measured socio-

economic, family, and child-behavior factors predicted frequent injury. **Conclusions** Results give little support to the concept of a heritable injury-prone trait in preschool children; environmental influences accounted for most of the injury variance in this sample. However, behavioral variables, especially the child's externalizing problem behaviors, are also important in explaining unintentional injuries.

**Key words:** environmental factors; genetic predisposition; injury-prone; twins; unintentional injuries.

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