

# Smoke Alarm FAQs

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH NURSES

The Maternal and Child Health Nurses Safe Sleeping Checklist has been updated in 2025 to include the following fire safety discussion point:

- Ensure there is a working smoke alarm that is less than 10 years old in the room/s where baby sleeps.
- A fire is four times more likely to be fatal without a working smoke alarm.

## Why do families need working smoke alarms?



- Fires are fast. In modern homes, fire can engulf a room within 3 minutes.
- Pre-school aged children are overrepresented in home fire fatality data.
- By law all residential properties must have working smoke alarms that comply with the Australian Standards.
- Fire services recommend that smoke alarms should be installed on **all levels** of the home and in **every bedroom**.

## How do families know if a smoke alarm is working?



- A smoke alarm can be tested by using a broom handle to push the button.
- The alarm should beep when the test button is depressed for 5 seconds.
- Fire services recommend that smoke alarms are tested each month.
- All smoke alarms need to be replaced every 10 years.
- If a smoke alarm is yellow in colour, it is likely to be older than ten years and should be replaced.

## Types of smoke alarms



### Smoke alarm powered by a 9-volt battery

**Cost from:** \$20 each

**Cons:** Cost to replace battery each year, and remembering to do it.



### Smoke alarm powered by a 10-year lithium battery in a tamper proof chamber

**Cost from:** \$30 each

**Pros:** The battery will not need to be replaced each year and no more annoying flat battery beeps.



### Wireless interconnected smoke alarm with a 10-year lithium battery

**Cost from:** \$90 each

**Pros:** When one smoke alarm activates, all alarms in the home will sound.

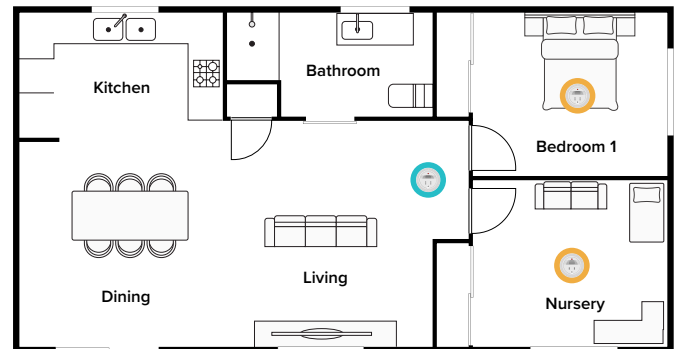
For more information on different types of smoke alarms and installation, FRV has a helpful video available at [youtu.be/ZrVDFit8njQ](https://youtu.be/ZrVDFit8njQ)

## Where should smoke alarms be located?

Smoke alarms are legally required in all residential properties. You must have one on every level of the house. Victorian fire services recommend that smoke alarms:

- be installed inside all bedrooms and living areas.
- are interconnected, so if one activates, they all do

Caravans, granny flats, mobile homes etc. must have at least one smoke alarm



Must be located between sleeping areas and the rest of the house



Additional smoke alarms should be inside all bedrooms

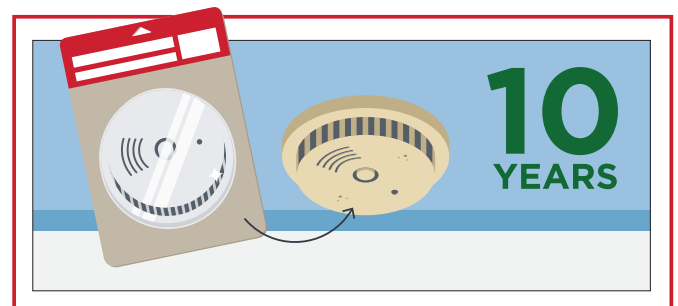
## Where don't you need them?

A smoke alarm is not required in the bathroom, laundry or kitchen as steam can activate them.

## Do they ever need to be replaced?

Yes! All types of smoke alarms need to be replaced every 10 years. This is because the sensor can wear out and stop working over time.

If a smoke alarm looks yellowed and old, it is probably much older than ten years and should be replaced.





## Smoke alarms in rental properties and public housing

- In Victoria rental providers (or landlords) are responsible for ensuring their property has working smoke alarms.
- A non-working smoke alarm is classified as an urgent repair.
- Residents **are permitted** to install additional smoke alarms in the home they are renting.
- Residents of public housing can request maintenance or repairs to smoke alarms by calling **13 11 72**.

## What if a family does not want to install a smoke alarm?

This can be an opportunity to discuss **why** they do not want to install a smoke alarm. Families may share frustrations relating to poorly located smoke alarms.

Concerns about nuisance alarms may be alleviated by re-positioning smoke alarms away from cooking areas and bathrooms. Families can be advised, at the very least to put a working smoke alarm where baby sleeps.

Families can be referred to **Country Fire Authority (CFA)** or **Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV)** for further information or advice about fire safety.

## Hearing impairment and smoke alarms?

Specialised smoke alarms are available for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. A subsidy scheme is available through Expression Australia at [expression.com.au/services/smoke-alarm-subsidy](https://expression.com.au/services/smoke-alarm-subsidy).

## Obtaining and installing smoke alarms

- Smoke alarms can be purchased by families relatively cheaply at hardware stores, supermarkets or online. Anyone who is confident to climb a ladder can install a smoke alarm.
- Where families face barriers to purchasing or installing smoke alarms or where there is an elevated risk of fire, fire services can at their discretion and with resident consent can provide and/ or install smoke alarms free of charge.



Scan to visit  
[frv.vic.gov.au/smoke-alarms](https://frv.vic.gov.au/smoke-alarms)



Scan to visit  
[cfa.vic.gov.au/smokealarms](https://cfa.vic.gov.au/smokealarms)

# Referral Pathway

## Referral criteria

Maternal and Child Health Nurses can refer families to fire services for additional fire safety advice and support where:

- The family is in the Enhanced Maternal and Child Health program
- The family living situation includes insecure or makeshift housing such as a garage, shed or caravan without a smoke alarm
- There are signs of increased fire risk in the home such as smoking indoors, hoarding, unsafe heating, unsafe cooking practices or a history of previous fires.
- Where there are financial or physical barriers and limited family or other supports that make it unlikely that the family will be able to install a smoke alarm themselves.

## Referral process

Discuss and gain consent for referral from family.

Email the following details to [atriskgroups@frv.vic.gov.au](mailto:atriskgroups@frv.vic.gov.au) or phone **(03) 9420 3879**

- Name
- Address
- Phone number
- Email, if possible.
- Reason for referral relating to fire safety

Families can expect to hear from CFA or FRV within two weeks of submitting a referral via phone. Families may choose for a support person or worker to be the main contact.

**If renting, by law the rental provider must provide working smoke alarms. For public housing maintenance or repairs call 13 11 72.**

If you are unsure if the family needs support please contact CFA and FRV [atriskgroups@frv.vic.gov.au](mailto:atriskgroups@frv.vic.gov.au) or phone **(03) 9420 3879**.



If you do not speak English, call the Translating and Interpreting Service for translated information **131 450**