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Coroner calls for improved vehicle safety awareness following deaths of two children

The deaths of two children in separate low speed vehicle accidents have prompted Victorian Coroner, Audrey Jamieson, to call for increased focus on the importance of road safety and awareness, particularly in young children.

Baby M, 16-month-old, died in February 2023 after she was struck by her father's utility vehicle as he slowly reversed down the driveway of the family home. Baby M's parents immediately rushed her to Wangaratta Base Hospital however, she could not be resuscitated and she passed away from her injuries. Victoria Police found no fault with the car though it was noted that the model of vehicle did not have sensors and the rear vision mirror did not provide visibility of objects close to the ground.

Joseph Hatzaw, 2-years-old, died in September 2023 after he was struck by a car at low speed in the carpark of New Hope Community Centre, Blackburn North. Joseph was with his family at an evening event when he and his younger brother left the Centre and ventured into the carpark. CCTV footage showed that within 65 seconds of leaving the venue, the boys had walked up the side of a temporarily parked Toyota Tarago which then struck Joseph as it rolled forward. Ambulance Victoria attended the scene however, Joseph could not be revived.

In the findings, released for the first time today, Coroner Jamieson sought to understand the extent to which children aged 0 to 14 years were vulnerable to fatal low speed vehicle accidents.

The investigation identified 25 fatalities between 2012 and 2023, including those of Baby M and Joseph. The fatal incidents involved a range of vehicles including sedans, utilities, SUVs and vans - with larger vehicles (e.g. SUVs and large utility vehicles) being overrepresented.

The highest number of deaths occurred in children aged between 1 and 5 years, with the majority of these being children aged 1. The data also showed that in 2023 there was a spike in low speed runover deaths in Victoria, with 6 children tragically losing their lives.

"The risks of children and roadways is not unknown to the general public" said Her Honour, "However, their small size can often prevent drivers from knowing of their presence until it is too late."

Coroner Jamieson acknowledged in her findings that from 1 November 2025, a new federal government standard, entitled 'Australian Design Rule 108/00', will mandate at least two reversing sensors on all domestic and commercial use vehicles.

While welcoming the new standard as a "promising initiative", Her Honour noted that the safeguard may not adequately detect very small children and would only apply to new vehicles. With the average age of registered passenger vehicles within Victoria being 10.98 years and 11.2 years nationally, Her Honour said "it may be some time before all Victorian vehicles have such safety measures."

Additionally, Coroner Jamieson noted the possibility that drivers could become complacent due to overreliance on such technologies. To mitigate this outcome, Her Honour commented that implementation of the new standard under Australian Design Rule 108/00 should be combined with a public education campaign on the danger of low speed runovers.

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Recognising the importance of safety education alongside new technology, Coroner Jamieson highlighted in her finding the work of Kidsafe Victoria, who have produced a multitude of resources including 'A Parent's Guide to Kidsafe Roads'. The Guide recommends that parents or caregivers should:

- always supervise children around cars, driveways and carparks, treat the driveway like a road and create a safe play area for children away from garages and driveways.
- not rely on reversing sensors or cameras alone
- always walk around the vehicle before getting into the vehicle to check there are no children around and wave goodbye from a safe place away from the driveway.

Her Honour also commended Kidsafe Victoria and TAC for their new 'Low Speed Runover Prevention Strategy'. The Strategy, the first of its kind in Victoria, has been launched today and establishes a framework for the development and implementation of driveway safety initiatives including advocacy, awareness raising and education.

"I commend Kidsafe Victoria and the Transport Accident Commission for the development of the Strategy, and for their continued efforts to reduce driveway runover incidents", said Her Honour, "I sincerely hope that the Strategy is fruitful, and that Victoria will see a reduction in these tragic deaths."

A copy of the finding into the death of Baby M can be accessed [here](#)

A copy of the finding into the death of Joseph Hatzaw can be accessed [here](#)

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