

The holidays should be a magical time for children. Yet each year, hospital emergency rooms treat about 8700 people for injuries, such as falls, cuts and shocks, related to holiday lights, decorations and Christmas trees.

In addition, Christmas trees are involved in about 400 fires annually, resulting in 20 deaths, 70 injuries and an average of more than \$15 million in property loss and damage. Young children are particularly at risk for injury from sharp objects, such as glass ornaments, or from well-intentioned gifts of toys that are not appropriate to their age.

Keep the season merry with this list of safety tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Safer Trees and Decorations

- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant." Although this label does not mean the tree won't catch fire, it does indicate the tree will resist burning and should extinguish quickly.

- When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and when bent between your fingers, needles do not break. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.

- When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces and radiators. Because heated rooms dry live trees out rapidly, be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Place the tree out of the way of traffic and do not block doorways.

- Cut a few inches off the trunk of your tree to expose the fresh wood. This allows for better water absorption and will help to keep your tree from drying out and becoming a fire hazard.

- Use only noncombustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded metals. Leaded materials are hazardous if ingested by children.

- Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreens. Always use nonflammable holders and place candles out of children's reach.

- Take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children to avoid the child swallowing or inhaling small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food, which may tempt a child to eat them.

- Wear gloves to avoid eye and skin irritation while decorating with spun glass "angel hair." Follow container directions carefully to avoid lung irritation while decorating with artificial-snow sprays.

Bright Ideas for Lights

- Indoors or outside, always use lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory that indicates conformance with safety standards.

- Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections, and throw out damaged sets.

- Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord.

- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.

- Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use.

Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use insulated staples to hold strings in place, not nails or tacks. Or run strings of lights through hooks (available at hardware stores).

Plug all outdoor electric decorations into circuits with ground fault circuit interrupters to avoid potential shocks.

Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.

Friendlier Fireplaces

Use care with "fire salts," which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting if eaten. Keep them away from children.

Do not burn wrapping papers in the fireplace. A flash fire may result, as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely.

Before lighting any fire, remove all greens, boughs, papers, and other decorations from fireplace area. Check to see that the flue is open.

Trouble-Free Toys

Before buying a toy or allowing your child to play with a toy that he has received as a gift, read the instructions carefully. If the toy is appropriate for your child, show him how to use it properly.

Follow recommended age ranges on toy packages. Toys that are too advanced could pose a safety hazard for younger children.

To prevent both burns and electrical shocks, don't give young children (under age ten) a toy that must be plugged into an electrical outlet. Instead, buy toys that are battery-operated.

Children under age three can choke on small parts contained in toys or games. Government regulations specify that toys for children under age three cannot have parts less than 1 1/4 inches in diameter and 2 1/4 inches long.

Children under age 8 can choke or suffocate on uninflated or broken balloons. Remove strings and ribbons from toys before giving them to young children.

Watch for pull toys with strings that are more than 12 inches in length. They could be a strangulation hazard for babies.

Outdoor Play

Make sure your child's gloves and shoes stay dry. If either becomes wet, change your child into a dry pair.

Sledding on or into the roadway should be prohibited. Look for shallow slopes that are free of obstacles, such as trees and fences.

Most skiing and skating injuries involve twists, sprains and strains. Prevent injuries by providing your child with competent instruction, proper equipment and appropriate supervision.

Happy Visiting

Clean up immediately after a holiday party. A toddler could rise early and choke on leftover food or come in contact with alcohol or tobacco.

Remember that the homes you visit may not be childproofed. Keep an eye out for danger spots.

Keep a laminated list with all of the important phone numbers you or a baby-sitter are likely to need in case of an emergency. Include the police and fire department, your pediatrician and the national Poison Help Line, 1-800-222-1222.

Traveling, visiting family members, getting presents, shopping, etc., can all increase your child's stress levels. Trying to stick to your child's usual routines, including sleep schedules and timing of naps, can help you and your child enjoy the holidays and reduce stress.

Food Safety

Bacteria are often present in raw foods. Fully cook meats and poultry, and thoroughly wash raw vegetables and fruits.

Be sure to keep hot liquids and foods away from the edges of counters and tables, where they can be easily knocked over by a young child's exploring hands.

Wash your hands frequently, and make sure your children do the same.

Never put a spoon used to taste food back into food without washing it.

Always keep raw foods and cooked foods separate, and use separate utensils when preparing them.

Always thaw meat in the refrigerator, never on the countertop.

Foods that require refrigeration should never be left at room temperature for more than two hours.

From [the American Academy of Pediatrics](#)