

Child Safety

The leading killer of children is injuries that occur in or near the child's own home. This year, more than 10,000 youngsters under age 14 will die from injuries and another 1 million will be injured badly enough to need medical treatment. Most of these injuries can be prevented by following these safety tips.

Fires

- Buy flame-resistant pajamas, which are made to resist fire better than ordinary fabrics.
- Turn off the oven when it's not in use. Check inside before you turn on the oven; your child may have stuffed something in there.
- Make sure your kitchen has an accessible dry chemical fire extinguisher safely out of the reach of your child. Keep a box of baking soda or a large pot lid near the stove for flare-ups.
- Keep the oven clean to prevent fires.
- Never leave a child alone with a lit fireplace, wood-burning stove or candles. Cover fireplaces with a secure screen.
- Lock up matches and lighters.
- Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and check batteries every 6 months. Conduct fire drills annually.

Burns

A child's skin can burn from heat – not just fire — because the skin is thinner than that of an adult.

- Tap water is a leading cause of burns. Keep your child away from hot water faucets. Reduce the maximum temperature on your water heater to 120 degrees F. Always check the water temperature before putting your son in the tub.
- Turn pot handles to the back of the stove. Use back burners as much as possible. Remove control knobs within a child's reach when not in use.
- Always place hot irons and curling irons far out of reach during and after use, and be careful to not let the cord dangle.
- Never leave a hot beverage near the edge of a counter or table. Also, never hold a child while drinking a hot liquid. Place hot coffeepots and coffee makers where kids can't pull them over.
- Mount your microwave so a child can't push the buttons. If the door opens while it's in use, hot food or liquid could splash out on your child.

- Be sure radiators have guards, and keep your child away from a floor register grate.

Electricity

- Cover all electrical outlets using plastic safety guards or by placing furniture in front of outlets when possible.
- Watch out for long or frayed wires that could cause someone to trip. Fasten excess cord with tape.
- Replace burned-out light bulbs immediately. Leaving lighting fixtures empty can be dangerous.
- Unplug small appliances when not in use.
- Avoid using space heaters and floor-level electric fans.
- Never keep hair dryers or other electrical appliances anywhere near sinks or tubs, where they could fall in and electrocute your child.

Falls

- Be sure your child cannot open windows and screens. Install guards on windows above the first floor.
- Stairs must be in good condition. Carpet or rugs should be tightly secured. Keep stairs clear of toys and other items.
- Never let your child hold anything sharp while running — an arrow, stick, sparkler or pinwheel could pierce a child's eye or puncture the skin in a fall.
- If throw rugs are used, anchor them securely.
- Put nonslip appliques or strips on the bottom of your bathtub, or use mats.
- Until your child is an expert at climbing stairs, keep safety gates at the top and bottom of every stairway. Avoid accordion-style gates with "V" shapes on top; young children have been strangled when their heads got stuck in the diamond-shaped openings.
- Block the way to basements, storage areas, furnace rooms and other hazardous places.
- Attach bookcases to the wall in case your child decides to climb up the "steps."
- Do not use baby walkers.

Choking and suffocation

- Don't buy rubber or latex balloons. A child can swallow an inflated balloon or suck the broken pieces of popped balloons into the windpipe. The rubber may block the child's airway, causing suffocation, or venture into the intestinal tract, causing a blockage. Since latex doesn't show up on an X-ray, it's often hard to determine the cause and location of the problem.

Child Safety (continued)

Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation may only compound the obstruction of the balloon.

- Do not allow small children to have suckers, gum or hard candy, and make sure older children don't run with these items in their mouths.
- Toddlers are at risk of choking on foods. The most commonly choked on foods are hot dogs, grapes, nuts, and some fruits and vegetables such as apples and carrots. Nuts should be avoided in toddlers. If other foods of this sort are offered, they should be cut small, and presented while a child is sitting and focused on eating. Eating while walking, or running increases the chance of choking.
- Remove an unused refrigerator or freezer immediately from your premises. If you do keep these items, make sure they're locked or have the doors removed so if your child happened to climb in, he would be able to climb back out and not become trapped.
- Avoid using hinged toy chests that could trap a child's head.
- Keep all plastic bags, such as grocery sacks and dry cleaning bags, away from children. To dispose of them safely, tie the bags in knots first.

Poisoning

In case of poisoning, parents should always contact the Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 for information. Do not follow the first-aid instructions on any container, as this information often is inaccurate and outdated. Parents should call 9-1-1 if their child has convulsions, stops breathing or becomes unconscious.

- Keep all medicines — including vitamins, herbal supplements and other over-the-counter preparations — out of reach in a locked medicine cabinet. Never leave them on a dresser or counter or in mom's purse. Check to make sure baby-sitters and relatives follow this important rule, too.
- Keep all poisons, cleaning products, beauty products and alcohol out of your child's reach. Examples: liquor, dish soap, household cleaners, insecticides, lighter fluid, shoe dye, nail polish, perfumes, paint, cigarettes and certain plants.
- Always keep labels on containers; in case of an accidental poisoning you may need to know what your child might have swallowed. Never store substances in anything other than their original container. A poison in a plastic bowl can look like food or drink to a child.
- Install safety latches on all cabinets and drawers you want to secure.

Cuts

- Knives should be put away at all times. Store knives, scissors or food-processor blades separate from other kitchen utensils.
- Wrap sharp objects, such as can lids and razor blades, before throwing them away.
- Store boxes of foil and plastic wrap up high; jagged package edges can cause nasty cuts.
- Use plastic and paper dishes and cups instead of breakables.
- Buy corner bumpers for all sharp table corners. Consider moving the coffee table out of the living room until your child can walk well.

Outside hazards

- Keep your yard clean and free of broken glass, broken concrete or bricks, old lumber and nails.
- Never use insecticides around children.
- Remove mushrooms as soon as they appear.
- If you have a fence with a gate, make sure the lock is too high for a 2-year-old to open.
- Avoid cleaning garbage cans with poisonous sprays, because children can get it on their hands or inhale fumes.
- Most garage items, such as lawn mowers, snowblowers and garden tools, can be dangerous. Keep kids away, especially while mowing — lawn mowers can expel objects with enough force to cause serious damage.

Drowning

- All children should be supervised around water.
- Learning to swim greatly reduces the chance of drowning.
- Bathroom doors should be closed and latched so that toddlers cannot access the toilet. Even that small amount of water can cause drowning.
- Similarly, 5 gallon utility buckets present a hazard to early walkers.
- Backyard pools should be fenced securely to prevent access by curious children.
- Don't leave young children alone in the bathtub.

Bicycles, skateboards, skis and scooters

- Helmets should be worn at all times. A properly fitted helmet will lie low on the forehead, and is secured with a buckle.
- All traffic rules should be obeyed.
- Padding can prevent extremity injuries.