Enjoy the Holidays Safely

Written by Erin Albertini, M.D./M.P.H. candidate
With Julie Belkowitz, M.D., M.P.H., Lyse Deus, and Oneith Cadiz, M.D.

Holiday celebrations are often the highlight of a child's year — from family gatherings and holiday decorating to opening presents and eating everyone's favorite foods. While the holidays are mostly joyful, there are safety considerations when it comes to decorations and gifts.

Here are some tips for keeping your home and family safe as you are decked the halls.

Decorate safely

When you are choosing holiday decorations, these tips will prevent injuries such as burns, cuts, and choking.

- Make sure your decorations are labeled as fire-resistant.
- Avoid sharp or breakable decorations.
- Avoid decorations with small pieces.
• If the decoration looks like food, don't let children near it.

Trim your tree without incident

If you are setting up a Christmas tree this year, make sure to keep it away from heat sources like fireplaces, ovens, stoves, and heaters to prevent it from catching on fire. Set up your tree away from doors and walkways so that no one trips or knocks it over.

If the tree feels wobbly, reposition it in the center of the stand and tighten the screws again. Or, buy a larger or smaller stand, so the trunk fits well. All stands should have wide legs to ensure the tree will be stable.

If you are buying a live tree, make sure it is fresh. Purchasing a fresh tree will help prevent fires in your home.

Here is how to tell if it is fresh.

• The bottom of the trunk feels sticky.
• The needles are: green, not dried out, and do not break or get pulled off the branches easily.
• When you bounce the tree on the ground, the needles should not fall off.

When you buy your live tree, ask the salesperson to cut a few inches off the trunk so that it can absorb water more efficiently. Make sure your tree stand is always filled with water, so the tree stays fresh. When your tree dries out, you should dispose of it quickly, so it does not cause a fire.

If you choose an artificial tree, make sure it is labeled as fire-resistant.
Light up the night

Holiday lights can be a source of fires if they are not checked for safety. Before you put up any strings of lights this year, make sure:

- All of the bulbs are working
- No wires are broken or exposed
- The sockets are intact

If you are buying new lights, make sure they are labeled as fire-resistant. Don't plug more than three strands of lights into one socket or extension cord. When you leave your house, turn off or unplug all of your lights.

Candles are lovely, fires are bad

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, every December, half of fires related to decorations are started by candles. Electric or other artificial candles are the safest.

Tips for safely decorating with candles this year:

- Keep candles at least 12 inches away from flammable objects.
- Take extra care with candles around your Christmas tree to prevent fires.
- Keep candles out of reach of children. And stay in the room while any candles are lit.
- Set up candles somewhere that they cannot be easily knocked over.
- Blow out the candles before going to bed at night.
Choose the right gifts

All kids love gifts. But if toys and gifts are not age-appropriate, safe, and well-made, they can cause injuries.

- Read the labels on the toy packages. These labels can tell you the age recommendation, whether the toy is safety approved and nontoxic.
- For small children, stick to larger toys that don't have small parts to prevent choking.
- For kids 3 and under, toys or detachable pieces of toys should not fit inside a toilet paper tube. If they do, they are a choking hazard for young kids.
- Avoid toys that shoot objects because these toys often cause eye injuries.
- Make sure toys are well-made. If a toy is stuffed, check the edge, seams, and any sewn-on pieces (like eyes) to ensure they are secure. Stuffed toys also should not contain pellets that kids can choke on. If you buy a plastic toy, make sure it is made from thick plastic that will not break easily.
- Try to avoid toys that contain magnets or small batteries, like button batteries. Magnets and batteries may be swallowed or stuck in children's ears or noses. Having batteries stuck in the body can cause serious injury, like burns, digestive tract damage, infection, or bleeding, and lead to hospitalization.
- If toys have strings or ribbons, remove them to prevent strangulation.
- Loud toys can damage your child's hearing, so make sure to check toys for volume.
- Do not place toys in a crib with a baby. If you hang toys, like mobiles, above a crib, make sure it is out of the baby's reach.
- When your family is unwrapping presents, throw away all wrapping paper and ribbons to avoid choking or fire hazards.
For more information about Holiday Safety, visit www.healthychildren.org or review suggestions from the Consumer Product Safety Commission. You can also view the CDC guidelines or contact the Injury Free Coalition for Kids, a program of the Children's Trust, at 305-243-9080 or online at www.injuryfreemiami.org. Happy holidays!

---

**Keep Your Head: Ride Your Bike Safely**

More than 100 children die from bike accidents a year. Help your child bike safety habits early to prevent falls or crashes that can lead to injury or death. Get tips on how to keep your child safe.

Content Type article