

Home

SAFETY



**"Safety First" is
"Safety Always."**
Charles M. Hayes

Make Your Home Healthier: 10 Ways to Make Your House Healthy and Safe

Every year, millions of kids are injured or exposed to toxins right under their own roof. Learn the top ways to keep your family safe.

Your home should be a haven: the one place where your children will be protected from harm. Still, more than 3 million kids get hurt at home each year, according to Safe Kids Worldwide, a nonprofit organization devoted to preventing unintentional injuries. Young children can spend up to 90 percent of their time indoors, so a healthy home environment is critical -- and yet many hazards aren't obvious. Experts say that these are the most important preventive steps to take.

Guard Against Scalding

You probably know that your young child could drown in the bathtub, but she's just as likely to get seriously burned. "Hot water can burn skin just like fire," says Meri-K Appy, president of the Home Safety Council. A baby or toddler who is exposed to 140 degrees F water can be scalded in less than five seconds -- so make sure your hot-water heater is set to 120 degrees F, and always test the water temperature yourself before placing your child in the tub.

Watch Out for Windows

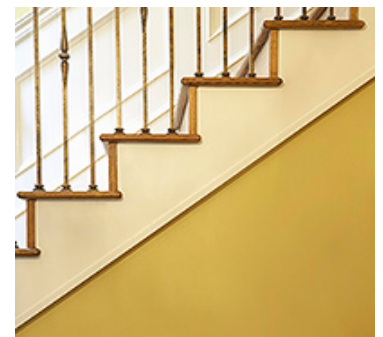
Every year, more than 4,000 kids end up in the emergency room after tumbling out of a window. It's crucial to install window guards (rows of bars no more than four inches apart that screw securely into the sides of window frames but can be released quickly by an adult in case of fire) or window stops (which prevent windows from opening more than four inches) on all upper-level windows. Babies and toddlers can be strangled by cords on blinds and shades, so place cribs and other furniture away from windows. It's best to use cordless window coverings in kids' bedrooms, but if you can't replace existing ones, visit windowcoverings.org to request free retrofit kits that make corded blinds and shades safer.

Foil Other Falls

They are the leading cause of unintentional injury for kids ages 14 and under, but your child's risk of being hurt in a fall -- down stairs or off furniture, for example -- multiplies once she's mobile.

"Toddlers are still mastering the whole walking thing, and they lose their balance a lot," says Debra Smiley Holtzman, author of *The Safe Baby*. Install wall-mounted baby gates at both the top and

bottom of stairs, and cushion corners and edges of tables and fireplace hearths with padding to protect your child from banging her head on them if she topples over.

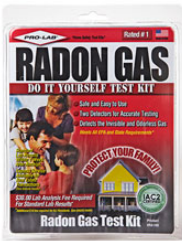


Renovate Carefully

If your home was built before 1978, there's probably lead in the paint under the top coats on your walls and windows, as well as in old floor varnish. When lead dust gets stirred up during a renovation (or when paint starts to chip), the toxic particles put your child at risk of developmental and learning problems -- so it's important to hire a contractor who's certified in safely removing leaded materials. Call the National Lead Information Center at 800-424-LEAD to find a contractor or an inspector to measure the lead level in your home or water. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), home tests for lead paint aren't always accurate.

Test for Radon

Approximately one in 15 homes (including apartments) has a high level of radon, a radioactive gas released when uranium naturally breaks down in soil, rocks, and water. Radon is believed to be the leading cause of lung cancer in nonsmokers, but because you can't see or smell it, you won't know if you're being exposed without testing for it. Fortunately, an inexpensive test kit that's available at home-improvement stores will be reliable in this case: Leave it out for as long as the directions recommend, and then promptly return it for analysis. The EPA considers a reading of 4 picocuries per liter of air (pCi/L) or greater to be unsafe. If your levels are high, you'll need to have a certified radon-mitigation contractor install a piping system to vent the gas out from under your home. The EPA even recommends that you consider doing this if your level is higher than 2 pCi/L. Contact your state radon office for more information at epa.gov/iaq/wherewelive.html. If you're building a new home, make sure your contractor uses radon-resistant construction techniques, and request a radon test as part of the inspection when purchasing a home. If yours tests negative, retest every two years or after renovations, says Elizabeth Blackburn, of the EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection and Environmental Education.



Be Prepared for Fire

Kids ages 5 and younger are twice as likely to die in a residential fire as older children or adults because it's harder for them to escape on their own. It's critical to have a smoke alarm on every floor including the basement as well as outside and inside every bedroom. Remember to test them monthly. You should also have one multipurpose fire extinguisher for every 600 square feet of living space. When using an extinguisher, remember PASS: Pull the pin. Aim at the base of the fire. Squeeze or press the handle. Sweep from side to side at the base of the fire until it goes out.

Monitor Carbon Monoxide

Low to moderate levels of this colorless and odorless gas can cause symptoms similar to the flu (without fever). But as levels increase, the toxic effects of carbon monoxide (CO) can be deadly, especially for children, because the gas prevents oxygen from getting to the heart and brain. "If you don't have carbon-monoxide alarms outside bedrooms and other sleeping areas,

you may not know your family's being poisoned until it's too late," warns Blackburn. Carbon monoxide is produced by the incomplete burning of fuels, including coal, wood, charcoal, oil, kerosene, propane, and natural gas. The most important way to prevent carbon-monoxide poisoning is to make sure that all your fuel-burning appliances are working properly, says Blackburn. Have your heating system (and chimney and flues) inspected each year. However, CO can also be created by equipment like portable generators, cars, lawn mowers, and power washers that are powered by an internal combustion engine. In fact, after Hurricane Ike in 2008, 15 different children suffered carbon-monoxide poisoning (and one died) because they were using a gas-powered electrical generator so that they could play video games.

Ban Bugs Safely

Mice, cockroaches, ants, and other pests are annoying, but they're usually not nearly as big a health threat as the toxins that get rid of them. "Pesticides contaminate the air your child breathes and the floor she plays on and increase her risk of developing neurological problems and cancer," says *Parents* advisor Philip Landrigan, M.D., director of Mount Sinai School of Medicine's Children's Environmental Health Center, in New York City. Instead, he suggests sealing off crevices in your floors and walls, weather-stripping doors and windows, and keeping your kitchen clean and free of food particles. If you must use pesticides, buy the smallest amount needed, and choose gels or baits instead of sprays.



Avoid Allergens and Irritants

Pound for pound, children breathe more air than adults do, so they're especially vulnerable to the effects of indoor environmental pollutants. Never let anyone smoke in your house; keep humidity levels at a minimum by using exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathrooms and a dehumidifier in your basement to prevent mold growth; remove any water-damaged carpet and furniture promptly; open doors and windows when cleaning, painting, or laying new carpet; and change furnace filters as recommended.

Lock Up Poisonous Products

That means not only cleaners, medications, and caustic cosmetic items like nail-polish remover but also perfume, bath oil, mouthwash, aftershave, and vitamins. More than 1 million kids are poisoned by ingesting common household items every year. Post the Poison Control Center's toll-free number (800-222-1222) near every phone in your house.

Food Safety

Every year in the U.S., about one in five people get sick from eating contaminated food. Usually this is a mild case of "tummy flu." But, because the immune systems of children are still developing, they are more susceptible to severe symptoms from food borne illnesses.

It is important that children learn sage food handling habits at an early age. As parents of young children, you can make a big difference by modeling safe food handling practices yourself.

As you put the mayonnaise in the refrigerator, you might comment, "It's important to put the mayonnaise away right after we finish with it because bad bacteria can grow in it if it gets warm." This may lead to a question about what bacteria are and you can continue the teaching experience by explaining. If you are not sure about the best way to handle a particular food, you can go to www.foodsafety.gov for information about best practices.

Home Safety Resources

Safe Kids Southeastern Idaho

Led by: Southeastern District Health Department
Coordinator: Cherie Nelson
1901 Alvin Ricken Dr
Pocatello, Idaho 83201
cnelson@phd6.idaho.gov 208-478-6315

Safe Kids Bear River

Led by: Bear River Health Department
Coordinator: Farrin Wiese
655 E 1300 N
Logan, Utah 84341
fwiese@utah.gov 435-792-6522

Safe Kids Weber-Morgan

Led by: Weber-Morgan Health Department
Coordinator: Jann Fawcett
477 23rd Street
Ogden, Utah 84401
jfawcett@co.weber.ut.us 801-399-7186

Poison Center 1-800-222-1222 www.poison.org

State of Idaho Poison Control Center

1055 N Curtis Rd, Boise, ID 83706 (800) 860-0620

The Utah Poison Control Center 1-800-222-1222. poison@hsc.utah.edu

Southeastern Idaho Public Health

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