



# NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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## Holiday safety reminder from BC Children's experts

**Vancouver, B.C.** – Experts at BC Children's Hospital are advising parents of young children to take some extra precautions to ensure a safe and happy holiday season. Choking, poisoning, and fireplace burns are serious dangers for young children, particularly at this time of year.

"Families entertain over the holidays, and there are often bowls of nuts or small candies on display at eye level of babies and toddlers. Nuts in particular are extremely dangerous for children under three. Even small pieces can become lodged within the bronchi and cause wheezing, or completely block a child's airway," says Dr. Jeff Ludemann, Attending Physician, Otolaryngology (Ear, Nose and Throat Medicine and Surgery), at Children's. "Many toys children receive as gifts have dangerously small parts that pose a choking hazard, and disc batteries which can become lodged in the throat and burn the esophagus. Older children have also been brought into the hospital after placing these small batteries in their nostrils, causing burns and ulcerations."

In addition, Christmas trees and ornaments may pose a threat. Surgeons at Children's have removed ornament hardware, decorative stickers, and tree twigs from children's throats in years past.

Another extreme hazard for young children are gas fireplaces, which are increasingly common in households throughout BC. The glass face of these fireplaces can reach temperatures of more than 200C (390F) in under 10 minutes and take more than 30 minutes to cool down. Always turn off the appliance when babies or young children are to be active in the area, or put up a permanent screen or gate if you use the fireplace as your main heat source in the home.

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“Each winter I see more than a dozen second and third degree fireplace burns, mostly on the hands and faces of toddlers. These burns are incredibly painful, and can take months to years to heal with repeated medical visits, possible skin grafts, rehabilitation and potential loss of range of motion. In most cases the incident happens while adults are in the room supervising,” says Dr. Cynthia Verchere, Plastic Surgeon with Children’s.

Poisoning is also a serious danger during the festive season, when alcoholic punch or mixed drinks that look like juice, Kool-aid or soda to an unsuspecting child pose a threat. Always ensure visiting friends and relatives keep bags and purses with medications and/or cigarettes out of reach of children.

*BC Children’s Hospital, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, provides expert care for the province’s most seriously ill or injured children, including newborns and adolescents. For more information please visit [www.bcchildrens.ca](http://www.bcchildrens.ca).*

*The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians. For more information please visit [www.phsa.ca](http://www.phsa.ca).*

**Please note:**

- Dr. Jeff Ludemann and a patient family are available for interviews about holiday choking hazards. Digital images of ornament hardware in throat x-ray are available.
- Dr. Cindy Verchere and a patient family are available for interviews about fireplace burns. Digital photos of burn victims are available.

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