



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. BC Children's is an academic health centre affiliated with the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, and the Child & Family Research Institute. For more information, please visit www.bcchildrens.ca.

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PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Don't forget safety for children during the holidays December 11, 2008

Vancouver, B.C. – If you are a parent with young children, take 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.

New and experienced parents may not be aware of how holiday celebrations can be hazardous to infants and toddlers. "Be aware of the risks and dangers," advises Alyson McKendrick, Coordinator with Safe Start, the injury prevention program at BC Children's Hospital, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. "Simple measures can help ensure your child doesn't end up in a hospital emergency room."

Safe Start offers the following tips to prevent injuries during the holidays.

Trees and Decorations. A child learns about objects by touching, feeling, and tasting. Decorative, colored tree lights can be appealing for young children to put in their mouths, which can cause severe burns. Young children can also pull trees onto themselves when they try to pull on decorative ornaments or try to pull themselves to a standing position using the bottom branches. Be aware that trimmings that look like candy or food may provide an extra appeal to young children to put the item in their mouths, which can cause choking.

- Make sure your Christmas tree is secure.
- Never use lit candles on a tree or near evergreens. Always use non-flammable lights and decorations, or avoid incandescent decorative lights completely.
- Take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable.
- Keep small, removable parts of ornaments out of children's reach.

Hanukkah Traditions. Curious young children will be attracted to flickering lights of a menorah and can easily get burned, and dreidels can pose a choking hazard.

- Make sure your menorah is kept on a high surface and is not too close to the edge of a table.
- If your child enjoys blowing out candles, make sure to tie hair back so it cannot catch on fire.
- Substitute smaller dreidels for larger ones.

Fireplace Safety. Gas fireplaces are popular, but the glass in front of the fireplace can get as hot as 450-600 degrees F, and it takes more than 45 minutes for a fireplace to cool off after use. Young children can get severe burns to their hands when they touch the glass in front of fireplaces.

- Avoid using gas fireplaces when young children are near, or turn them off well in advance of children visiting.
- Purchase specially-designed fireplace screens and guards. Ensure they are secured.

Toy Safety. Small pieces can come off and become choking hazards, and batteries can cause choking as well as internal chemical burns.

- Inspect all toys to make sure they are in good working order.
- If a toy uses small batteries, ensure curious toddlers cannot inadvertently get access to them.
- Select toys that fall within your child's recommended age level. Most toys have age recommendations listed on the package. These are based on safety hazards, not how smart your child is.

A New TV? More than 100 children are brought to emergency rooms in Canada each year as a result of TV sets falling on them.

- Ensure your TV is placed on low, sturdy furniture.
- Use anchors or furniture straps to secure the furniture to the wall.
- Make sure children never sit too close to a TV. They may accidentally pull the TV onto themselves.

Visiting Others. The homes you visit may not be childproofed. Each year, curious toddlers choke or get poisoned by exploring and getting their hands on items not meant for children.

- Alcoholic drinks, hard candies, and nuts should be kept well out of young children's reach. If they are within reaching distance, find a safe playing spot away from these items.
- Keep young children away from all plants. Plants like mistletoe berries, holly, and poinsettia are either poisonous or can cause irritation if touched or swallowed.
- Bring safe toys and foods for your child when visiting.
- If you are entertaining in your own home, make the indoor space a smoke-free environment. Set up an outdoor smoking area for guests who need to smoke.
- Designate a safe space for visitors' purses and coats. Place purses on the top shelf of a cupboard or on top of a fridge to prevent poisoning by swallowing pills, cigarettes, or other small items from visitors' purses.

"It's easy to become distracted during the holiday season," says Alyson. "With a little extra caution, parents of young children can enjoy the festivities without having to worry about their children being injured."

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Please note:

- Alyson McKendrick is available for interviews Dec 15-19.
- A digital image of a x-ray showing ornament hardware in a throat is available.

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