Winter/Holiday Safety Tips

Whether winter brings severe storms, light dustings, or just cold temperatures, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has some valuable tips on how to keep your children safe and warm.

Seasonal Clothing & What to Wear

- Dress infants and children warmly for outdoor activities. Several thin layers will keep them dry and warm. Clothing for children should consist of thermal long johns, turtlenecks, one or two shirts, pants, sweater, coat, warm socks, boots, gloves or mittens, and a hat.
- The rule of thumb for older babies and young children is to dress them in one more layer of clothing than an adult would wear in the same conditions.
- Blankets, quilts, pillows, sheepskins and other loose bedding may contribute to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and should be kept out of an infant's sleeping environment. Sleep clothing like one-piece sleepers is preferred.
- If a blanket must be used to keep a sleeping infant warm, it should be tucked in around the crib mattress, reaching only as far as your baby's chest, so the infant's face is less likely to become covered by bedding.

Frostbite Prevention

Frostbite happens when the skin and outer tissues become frozen. This condition tends to happen on extremities like the fingers, toes, ears and nose. They may become pale, gray and blistered. At the same time, the child may complain that her skin burns or has become numb.

Set reasonable time limits on outdoor play. Have children come inside periodically to warm up. If frostbite occurs, bring the child indoors and place the frostbitten parts of her body in warm (not hot) water. Warm washcloths may be applied to frostbitten nose, ears and lips.

- Do not rub the frozen areas.
- After a few minutes, dry and cover him with clothing or blankets. Give him something warm to drink.

If the numbness continues for more than a few minutes, call your doctor.

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Winter Health

If your child suffers from winter nosebleeds, try using a cold air humidifier in the child's room at night. Saline nose drops may help keep tissues moist. If bleeding is severe or recurrent, consult your pediatrician.

Many pediatricians feel that bathing two or three times a week is enough for an infant's first year. More frequent baths may dry out the skin, especially during the winter.

Cold weather does not cause colds or flu. But the viruses that cause colds and flu tend to be more common in the winter, when children are in school and are in closer contact with each other. Frequent hand washing, not sharing food/drinks, and teaching your child to sneeze or cough into her elbows may help reduce the risk of colds and flu. Children between the ages of 6 and 59 months should get the influenza vaccine to reduce their risk of catching the flu.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia develops when a child's temperature falls below normal due to exposure to cold. It often happens when a youngster is playing outdoors in extremely cold weather without wearing proper clothing.

As hypothermia sets in, the child may shiver and become lethargic and clumsy. His speech may become slurred and his body temperature will decline. If you suspect your child is hypothermic, call 911 at once.

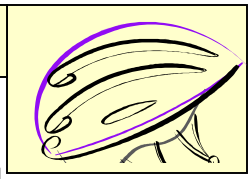
Until help arrives, take the child indoors, remove any wet clothing, and wrap him in blankets or warm clothes.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

These guidelines from the CDC can help you avoid exposing your family to carbon monoxide: Have your heating system, water heater, and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year. Install a battery-operated detector in your home & check/replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring/fall. If your detector sounds, evacuate your home immediately and call 911. Seek prompt medical attention if you suspect CO poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed, or nauseated. Do not use a generator, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline or charcoal-burning device inside your home, basement, or garage or near a window. Do not run a car or truck inside a garage attached to your house, even if you leave the door open. Do not burn anything in a stove or fireplace that is not vented. Do not heat your house with a gas oven.

Winter Sports & Activities

Helmets help prevent injury!



Ice Skating

Allow children to skate only on approved surfaces. Check for signs posted by local police or recreation departments, or call your local police department to find out which areas have been approved. Advise your child to: skate in the same direction as the crowd, avoid darting across the ice, never skate alone, do not chew gum or eat while skating, and wear a helmet.

Sledding

- Keep sledders away from motor vehicles.
- Children should be supervised.
- Keep young children separated from older children.
- Sledding feet first or sitting up, instead of lying down headfirst, may prevent head injuries.
- Use steerable sleds, not snow disks or inner tubes.
- Sleds should be structurally sound and free of sharp edges and splinters, and the steering mechanism should be well lubricated.
- Sled slopes should be free of obstructions – like fire hydrants, benches, stone walls, or fences - be covered in snow not ice, not be too steep (slope of less than 30°), and end with a flat runoff.
- Avoid sledding in overcrowded areas.
- Young children should wear a helmet.

Snow Skiing & Snowboarding

All children should be taught to ski or snowboard by a qualified instructor in a program designed for children, and remind them to never ski or snowboard alone. Young children should always be supervised by an adult. Older children's need for adult supervision depends on their maturity and skill. If they are not with an adult, than they should at least be accompanied with a friend. The AAP recommends that children under age 7 not snowboard.

All children should wear a helmet, & equipment should fit the child and be in good condition. Skiers should wear safety bindings that are adjusted at least every year. Snowboarders should wear gloves with built-in wrist guards. Slopes should fit the ability and experience of the skier or snowboarder.

Avoid overcrowded slopes.

Snowmobiling

The AAP recommends that children under age 16 not operate snowmobiles and that children under age 6 never ride on snowmobiles. Do not use a snowmobile to pull a sled or skiers. Wear goggles and a safety helmet approved for use on motorized vehicles like motorcycles. Travel at safe speeds & never use alcohol or other drugs before or during snowmobiling. Never snowmobile alone & stay on marked trails, away from roads, water, railroads and pedestrians.

Fire Safety

Fireplaces

Before lighting any fire, remove all greens, boughs, papers, and any other decorations from fireplace area and check to see that the flue is open. Use care with "fire salts," which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting if eaten. Keep them away from children. Do not burn wrapping papers in the fireplace. A flash fire may result as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely.

Fire Prevention

- Be sure your gas water heater is off the ground. Spilled flammable liquids will be ignited by the pilot light.
- Have your heating system and fireplace checked and cleaned yearly. Fall is a great time to do this.
- Leave plenty of room around space heaters. They should be at least 3 feet from anything that might burn, like curtains and furniture. Turn space heaters off and unplug them when you go to bed or leave the home.
- Check electric appliances/cords regularly for wear or loose connections. Use only appropriate fuses for lighting circuits. Never use a substitute for a fuse.
- Do not smoke in your home, especially in bed.
- Dispose of cigarette butts, matches, and ashes with care & keep matches and lighters away from children.

Smoke & CO Detector Batteries

An easy way to remind yourself to change your home's smoke detector batteries is to change them when you change your clocks in the Fall & Spring. If you have not already, replace your batteries as soon as possible.

Sun Protection Reminder

The sun's rays can still cause sunburn in the winter, especially when they reflect off snow. Make sure to cover your child's exposed skin with sunscreen.

Beware of Thin Ice

Remember to always caution your child about the risks of drowning during the winter by falling through thin ice.

Did you Know?

Winter weather & cold temperatures DO NOT cause illness in children, germs do! Please continue to encourage outdoor exercise for your children during the winter months.

Have a Safe & Healthy Holiday Season!

The holiday season is an exciting time of year for kids, and to help ensure they have a safe holiday, here are some tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

Toy Safety

- Select toys to suit the age, abilities, skills and interest level of the intended child. Toys too advanced may pose safety hazards for younger children.
- Before buying a toy or allowing your child to play with a toy that he has received as a gift, read the instructions carefully.
- To prevent both burns and electrical shocks, don't give young children (under age ten) a toy that must be plugged into an electrical outlet. Instead, buy toys that are battery-operated.
- Children under age three can choke on small parts contained in toys or games. Government regulations specify that toys for children under age three cannot have parts less than 1 1/4 inches in diameter and 2 1/4 inches long.
- Children under age 8 can choke or suffocate on uninflated or broken balloons. Remove strings and ribbons from toys before giving them to young children.
- Watch for pull toys with strings that are more than 12 inches in length. They could be a strangulation hazard for babies.

Happy Visiting

- Clean up immediately after a holiday party. A toddler could rise early and choke on leftover food or come in contact with alcohol or tobacco.
- Remember that the homes you visit may not be childproofed. Keep an eye out for danger spots.
- Keep a laminated list with all of the important phone numbers you or a baby-sitter are likely to need in case of an emergency. Include the police and fire department, your pediatrician and the national Poison Help Line, 1-800-222-1222.

Traveling, visiting family members, getting presents, shopping, etc., can all increase your child's stress levels. Trying to stick to your child's usual routines, including sleep schedules and timing of naps, can help you and your child enjoy the holidays and reduce stress.

Decorations

- Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded metals.
- Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreens. Always use non-flammable holders, and place candles where they will not be knocked down.
- In homes with small children, take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children to avoid the child swallowing or inhaling small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a young child to eat them.
- Wear gloves to avoid eye and skin irritation while decorating with spun glass "angel hair." Follow container directions carefully to avoid lung irritation while decorating with artificial snow sprays.

Trees

- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant."
- When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and when bent between your fingers, needles do not break. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.
- When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces, radiators or portable heaters. Place the tree out of the way of traffic and do not block doorways.
- Cut a few inches off the trunk of your tree to expose the fresh wood. This allows for better water absorption and will help to keep your tree from drying out and becoming a fire hazard. Be sure to keep the stand filled with water, because heated rooms can dry live trees out rapidly.

Lights

- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
- Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use. To hold lights in place, string them through hooks or insulated staples, not nails or tacks. Never pull or tug lights to remove them.
- Check all tree lights-even if you've just purchased them-before hanging them on your tree. Make sure all the bulbs work and that there are no frayed wires, broken sockets or loose connections.
- Plug all outdoor electric decorations into circuits with ground fault circuit interrupters to avoid potential shocks.
- Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.

This handout was developed by Affiliated Pediatric Practices (APP). Your pediatric practice is a member of Affiliated Pediatric Practices – an organization working for the health and safety of our children. These safety tips have been established solely as general and additional resource for parents. They do not constitute medical advice nor replace the need to seek the independent medical judgment of your physician or medical provider in any specific case. These tips, based upon AAP guidelines, are current as of the date that they are printed, and are subject to change as new information is available. For up-to-date information, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics website at www.aap.org.