



Home Safety for Children

Homes can be wonderful places to care for children, but homes are also full of hazards, including electrical appliances, stairs, bathtubs, and dozens of poisonous medicines and household cleaners. Accidents are a leading cause of death in children. More children are crippled from accidents than from diseases. Most accidents could be prevented if more care were taken.

There is no golden rule to prevent accidents, but you can decrease the risks greatly by following the ideas listed below. Use this publication as a checklist, and see how well you are doing with safety in your house. Review the checklist from time to time to maintain safety.

FALLS AND FALLING OBJECTS

- Position tables, chairs, shelving, and other furniture so they cannot turn over easily.
- Screen windows; make sure they open from the top or else block children's access to them.
- Provide railings on stairs, porches, decks, and lofts.
- Put tread mats or carpet on steps to prevent slipping, and attach a handrail that children can reach.
- Secure carpets and rugs so children cannot trip.
- Use safety gates to block access to stairs and other dangerous areas.
- Do not use infant walkers, especially near stairs.
- Use only high chairs with a wide base so they cannot tip over easily.
- Use high chairs with a waist strap or a belt.
- Never leave infants in infant carriers that are left on a high surface such as a table, a counter, or a chair.
- Keep sides of playpens and cribs raised always. Make sure that crib sides cover at least three-fourths of a child's height.
- Keep electric cords to lamps and appliances where children cannot reach them.
- Keep unused rooms, basements, and attics locked when children are in your home.
- Make sure that all doors to rooms and closets can be unlocked from both sides.
- Place heavy items (like irons or skillets) out of the reach of children.
- Teach children which areas are safe or unsafe for climbing. Shelves or counters are not safe for climbing.
- Wipe spills from floors immediately.
- If your garage door has an electric opener, make sure it has a safety feature that causes the door to go back up when it touches an object or a person in its way.

POISONS

- ❑ Keep trash covered and out of children's reach.
- ❑ Keep cigarettes, cigarette butts, and all tobacco products away from children. Tobacco is poisonous when eaten.
- ❑ Provide a nonsmoking environment for children.
- ❑ Keep perfumes, cosmetics, and other products in high cabinets with safety latches or locks.
- ❑ Do not store alcoholic beverages, cleaning supplies, cosmetics, pet supplies, medicines, vitamins, gasoline, paint thinners, fertilizers, weed killers, and other poisons in areas used by children.
- ❑ Clean up immediately after parties when alcoholic beverages were served.
- ❑ Store hazardous products in their original containers. Do not transfer them to used food or beverage containers or to food storage areas.
- ❑ Keep purses out of the reach of children.
- ❑ Do not use insect poisons, rat poisons, or weed killers when children are present.
- ❑ Dispose of leftover poisons immediately.
- ❑ Follow directions and caution warnings on drugs, cosmetics, and chemicals.
- ❑ Make sure that walls, furniture, and toys have only lead-free paint on them.
- ❑ Check to make sure there is no peeling paint on walls or furniture.
- ❑ Have your home checked for radon, which is an odorless gas that seeps through the soil into homes. Inexpensive test kits can be purchased at most building supply stores.
- ❑ Check toys and materials to make sure they contain nontoxic, nonpoisonous materials. Look for the "CP" or "AP" seal that shows they are safe art materials for children.
- ❑ Keep Syrup of Ipecac in your first aid kit for use if you must get your child to vomit up a swallowed poison.
- ❑ Flush old medicines down the toilet.
- ❑ Store medicines right after use in a high, locked, or otherwise childproof cabinet
- ❑ Teach children not to taste things like berries, roots, plants, pills, or tablets without your permission.
- ❑ Label all houseplants, and remove poisonous plants.
- ❑ Remove all outdoor plants that might have poisonous parts.
- ❑ Label the telephone with the phone number of the Poison Control Center at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson: (601) 354-7660.

CHOKING AND SUFFOCATION

- ❑ Make sure that toys have no small parts that could be broken off and swallowed.
- ❑ Use balloons only with close adult supervision. Pop and dispose of balloons right after use.
- ❑ Do not allow children under 3 years to play with any toy that is less than 1¼ inch in diameter (about the size of a half-dollar).
- ❑ Make sure that mesh-sided playpens have holes no larger than one-fourth of an inch.
- ❑ Remove hanging crib toys when infants are able to pull themselves up.
- ❑ Remove plastic wrap on crib mattresses.
- ❑ Do not feed children under 4 years nuts, hard candies, popcorn, pretzels, or raw carrots. Cut hotdogs or sausages into small bites and not round slices.
- ❑ Put infants to sleep in cribs or playpens and never on adult beds, waterbeds, thick rugs, pillows, or bean-bags.
- ❑ Place babies on their backs in cribs.

- ❑ Teach children to chew their food well and to eat only while seated.
- ❑ Do not store clothing in dry-cleaning bags where children can reach them.
- ❑ Promptly dispose of all plastic bags, including small bread sacks, out of children's reach.
- ❑ Remove doors or lids from old freezers, refrigerators, cars/car trunks.
- ❑ Remove latches and lids from toy chests. Install a slow-closing hinge, and make sure the chest has air holes.
- ❑ Do not allow children to use or play with objects that have long cords. This includes pacifiers with attached strings, long telephone cords, old jewelry, necklaces, and long scarves.
- ❑ Do not purchase clothing with drawstrings in the neck area.
- ❑ Tie hanging cords on draperies or blinds up high and out of children's reach.
- ❑ Install clotheslines out of children's reach.
- ❑ Use only safety gates with a straight-topped edge and a rigid mesh screen. Do not use old accordion-style safety gates.
- ❑ Space stair railings and crib rails $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches apart.
- ❑ Make sure that crib mattresses fit tightly, with no more than two finger widths in the gap between mattress and crib frame.
- ❑ Teach children to look both ways when crossing streets and to hold an adult's hand.

OUTDOOR SAFETY

- ❑ Cover a sand box when not in use.
- ❑ Fence an outdoor play area if it is near a street, parking lot, pond, well, or railroad track.
- ❑ Fence in all pool areas, and install locking gates.
- ❑ Keep all gates closed, and install childproof latches.
- ❑ Check play areas often for trash, sharp branches, tools, lawn equipment, or animal waste.
- ❑ Teach children not to play near streets and to ask for help if toys rolls into streets or driveways.
- ❑ Keep outdoor play equipment at least 6 feet away from pavements, fences, trees, buildings, or other play equipment.
- ❑ Make sure the surface area under play equipment will provide cushioning (use a 1-foot layer of sand, pea gravel, or wood chips). Extend the surface area at least 6 feet beyond the edge of the equipment.
- ❑ Cover bolts or screws with plastic safety caps so they won't injure children.
- ❑ Cover chains on play equipment with plastic tubing unless openings are less than $\frac{5}{8}$ inches.
- ❑ Completely cover hooks on swings .
- ❑ Lock storage sheds, barns, and garages.
- ❑ Require children to use helmets with bicycles, skateboards, and roller blades.





For more information, please call your county Extension office.

For a source of current toy safety standards, visit the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's website at <http://www.cpsc.gov/>.

Adapted from the National Network for ChildCare – NNCC. (1993) Oesterreich, L. Holt, B. G., Karas, S. Home Safety Checklist, "Iowa Family Child Care Handbook," pp. 127-131. Iowa State University Extension. Ames, Iowa.

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