

Home Safety Checklist for Parents

Homes are wonderful places to care for children, but they are full of hazards including electrical appliances, stairs, bathtubs, and dozens of poisonous medicines and household cleaners.

Unintentional injuries cause the death of many children and also leave more children crippled than do diseases. Most injuries can be prevented if more care is taken.

There is no golden rule to prevent injuries, but you can decrease the risks significantly by following the ideas listed below. Use it as a checklist and find out how well you are doing with safety in the house. Go over the checklist from time to time to maintain safety.

Falls and falling objects

- Position tables, chairs, shelving, and other furniture so that they cannot be toppled easily.
- Screen windows, and make sure they open from the top or have a barricade in front.
- Provide railings on stairs, porches, decks, and lofts.
- Equip steps with tread mats or carpet and a handrail that children can reach.
- Secure carpets and rugs so that children cannot trip.
- Use safety gates with straight top edges to block access to stairs and other dangerous areas.
- Do not use infant walkers especially near stairs.
- Use only high chairs that have a wide base so they cannot tip easily.
- Use high chairs with a waist strap.
- Never leave infants in infant carriers that are left on a high surface such as a table, counter, or 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 up and out of the way.

- Keep unused rooms, basement, attic, etc., 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 an iron or skillet) out of a child's reach.
- Teach children safe and unsafe areas for climbing. Shelves or counters are not for climbing.
- Wipe spills from floors immediately.
- If your garage door has an electric opener, make sure that it has a safety feature that causes the door to go back up when it touches an object or person in the way.

Poison

- Keep trash covered and out of the reach of children.
- Keep all cigarettes, cigarette butts, and all tobacco products away from children. Tobacco is poisonous when eaten.
- Provide a non-smoking environment for children.
- Keep perfumes and cosmetics and other drug products in high cabinets with safety latches or locks.
- Do not store alcoholic beverages, cleaning supplies, cosmetics, pet supplies, medicines, vitamins, gasoline, paint thinner, fertilizer, weed killer, and other poisons in areas used by children.
- Store hazardous products in their original containers. Do not transfer them to used food or beverage containers or to a food storage area.
- 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 lead-free paint only.

- Check to make sure that there is no peeling paint on walls or furniture.
- Have your home checked for radon—an odorless gas that seeps through the soil into homes. Inexpensive test kits can be purchased at most hardware stores. If you need more information, call Answerline at (800) 262-3804.
- Check private water supplies annually with a laboratory analysis for bacteria and nitrates.
- Check toys and materials to make sure they contain nontoxic, nonpoisonous materials. Look for the “CP” or “AP” seal signifying safe art material for children.
- Flush old medicines down the toilet.
- Store medicines immediately after use in a high, locked, or otherwise child-inaccessible space.
- Teach children not to taste things like berries, roots, plants, pills, or tablets without your permission.
- Label all house plants and remove poisonous plants.
- Remove all outdoor plants that might have poisonous parts.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector.
- Teach children to chew their food well and to eat only when sitting down.
- Do not store clothing in dry cleaning bags that are accessible to children.
- Store all plastic bags including small bread sacks out of reach of children.
- Remove doors or lids from old freezers, refrigerators, and cars and car trunks.
- Remove latches and lids from toy chests. Install a slow closing hinge and make sure the chest has ventilation holes.
- Do not allow children to use or play with objects that have long cords. This includes pacifiers with strings attached, long telephone cords, old jewelry, necklaces, and long scarves.
- Tie hanging cords on draperies or blinds up high and out of reach.
- Install clotheslines out of reach of children.
- Use only safety gates that have a straight topped edge and a rigid mesh screen. Do not use old accordion style safety gates.
- Space stair railings and crib rails 23/8 inches apart.
- Make sure that crib mattresses fit tightly with no more than two finger widths in the gap between mattress and crib frame.

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 immediately after use.
- Do not allow children under 3 to play with any toy that is less than 1 1/4 inch in diameter (about the size of a half dollar).
- Make sure that mesh-sided playpens have holes no larger than 1/4 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 age 4 nuts, hard candies, popcorn, pretzels, or raw carrots. Cut hot dogs or sausages into small bites and NOT round slices.
- Put infants to sleep in a crib or a play pen and NEVER on an adult bed, waterbed, thick rug, pillow, or bean bag.

Burns, electrical shock, or fire

- Do not heat bottles and baby food in the microwave.
- Stir and check all microwave heated foods for “hot spots” before serving to children.
- Set the water heater in your home to a temperature of 120 degrees Fahrenheit or less.
- Cover unused electrical outlets with safety caps.
- Block electrical outlets when possible with some type of barrier or furniture.
- Fit Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCI) on electrical outlets in kitchens, bathrooms, and outdoor areas to prevent risk of electrical shock when in contact with water.
- Keep electrical cords for appliances (irons, toasters, radios, etc.) out of reach.
- Make sure that children cannot get to the back of a television set.

- Place stereos, VCRs, computers, and other electrical equipment up high and out of reach.
- Avoid running cords under rugs, over hooks, or through door openings.
- Store lighters and matches out of reach.
- Use screens or barriers around fireplaces, wood stoves, heaters, radiators, hot water pipes, furnaces, or steam-producing vaporizers.
- Never leave children alone in a room with an open fire, heater, or hot stove.
- Replace used and worn electrical cords or equipment.
- Keep pots and pans on the back side of the stove where children can't reach them. Turn handles to the back.
- Install smoke detectors and test them every month.
- Keep an approved fire extinguisher in a secure area.
- Store combustible materials away from furnaces, stoves, or water heaters.

Drowning

- Never leave children alone in the bathtub or swimming pool or with water play.
- Keep toilet lids closed.
- Empty mop buckets, ice chests, or pails of water immediately after use. (Children can drown in 2 or 3 inches of water.)
- Do not allow children to play near ponds, storm sewers, or excavations.
- Protect, cover, and childproof wells and cisterns.

Cuts and punctures

- Keep all sharp objects out of reach (cooking knives, silverware, cooking utensils, scissors, razors, plastic wrap boxes, glass bottles or drinking glasses, knitting needles).
- Do not allow children to play with sharp tools or around lawn mowers and power saws.
- Mark glass windows and doors with decals or tape to increase visibility. If possible, install safety glass.

Automobile safety

- Do not allow children to play near or behind a parked car.
- Use seat belts and car seats when traveling by car.
- Never leave children alone in a car.
- Do not give foods that could cause choking.
- Cover hot vinyl seats with a large towel or sheet.
- Keep purses and other dangerous items out of reach.
- Teach children to sit calmly and quietly while in an automobile or bus. Leave toys that encourage vigorous activity at home or in the trunk.
- Teach children to look both ways when crossing the street and to hold the hand of an adult.

Outdoor safety

- Cover sand box when not in use.
- If an outdoor play area is near a street, parking lot, pond, well, or railroad track, fence the area.
- Keep gates closed and install childproof latches.
- Check play area routinely for trash, sharp branches, tools, lawn equipment, or animal feces.
- Regularly inspect outdoor play equipment for broken, worn, or missing parts. Remove, repair, or replace items immediately.
- Teach children not to play near the street and to ask for help if toys roll into the street or driveway.
- Keep outdoor play equipment at least 6 feet away from pavement, fences, trees, buildings, or other play equipment.
- Make sure that surface areas under play equipment is impact absorbing (such as sand, pea gravel, or wood chips). Uncompressed, this material should be a minimum of 12 inches for equipment up to eight feet high. It should extend at least six feet beyond the edge of stationary equipment.
- Cover all protruding bolts or screws with plastic safety caps.
- Close hooks completely on swings.
- Lock storage sheds, barns, and garages.
- Require children to use helmets with bicycles, skateboards, or rollerblades.

Pets

Having a pet to talk to and to touch can be a great psychological benefit to children, especially to shy youngsters. But keeping pets in the home can involve risks.

Furry animals (especially cats) may pick up and transport fungus spores through their coats. A child petting the cat can transfer these spores to his or her own body. A youngster may get bitten if a pet is mishandled or overstimulated in play, too. The danger is greater in older dogs that are prone to epilepsy because the excitement of play might bring on a seizure.

Pet turtles can pass on salmonella (an intestinal infection) and are, therefore, not recommended. If you have a bird of the parrot family (a budgie or parakeet, lovebird, etc.), keep it away from rooms where the children will play or sleep. If infected, these birds can transmit an airborne respiratory illness to humans.

Litter boxes are a problem too. Young children are apt to put just about anything in their mouths, and cat feces may contain organisms that can be transmitted to humans. Most infections are mild, but if a pregnant woman becomes infected, it can cause birth defects in the unborn child (Toxoplasmosis).

The benefits of pets far outweigh the risks in most cases. Reduce possible hazards to children by following these simple precautions:

- Teach the children to wash their hands after touching the animals. This is especially important before eating.
 - Keep your pets clean. Because dogs and cats use their tongues to clean themselves, try to discourage pets from licking the children and vice versa.
 - Empty kitty litter boxes daily. If you are pregnant, have someone else do this job.
 - Keep sandboxes covered when not in use to prevent cats from adopting it as a litter box.
- Keep your pets free from internal and external parasites. (Fleas can bite children too.) Make sure that pets receive all the needed vaccinations, including distemper and rabies shots (for cats as well as dogs).
 - Clean up animal feces in your yard. Infected dogs and cats can transmit roundworms to children through feces.
 - Change soiled diapers immediately to avoid any undesirable behavior on the part of pets.

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