

# HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter  
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## Holiday Safety

The holidays are filled with fun and joy, but that fun and joy can easily disappear when avoidable accidents happen. The most common accidents that occur during the holidays are related to fires, toys, and winter sports. Holiday accidents are easily preventable if simple steps are taken when preparing and participating in holiday activities

### Fire Related Accidents

Each year fires occurring during the holiday season claim the lives of over 400 people, injure 1,650 more, and cause over \$990 million in damage. According to the United States Fire Administration (USFA), there are simple life-saving steps you can take to ensure a safe and happy holiday. By following these tips fire related accidents can be easily prevented.

- **Preventing Christmas Tree Fires**

Special fire safety precautions need to be taken when keeping a live tree in the house. A burning tree can rapidly fill a room with fire and deadly gases.

When selecting a tree for the holiday, needles on fresh trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches, and the needle should not break if the tree has been freshly cut. The trunk

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should be sticky to the touch. Old trees can be identified by bouncing the tree trunk on the ground. If many needles fall off, the tree has been cut too long, has probably dried out, and is a fire hazard. When caring for a tree, do not place your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks. Be careful not to drop or flick cigarette ashes near a tree. Do not put a live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Keep the tree stand filled with water at all times. When disposing of a tree, never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or wood-burning stove. When the tree becomes dry, discard it promptly. The best way to dispose of a tree is by taking it to a recycling center or having it hauled away by a community pick-up service. If using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame retardant.

- **Holiday Lights**

Maintaining holiday lights is an important step in fire prevention during the holiday season. Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, and excessive kinking or wear before putting them up. Use only lighting listed by an approved testing laboratory. Do not overload

electrical outlets. Do not link more than three light strands, unless the directions indicate it is safe. Connect the strings of lights to an extension cord before plugging the cord into the outlet. Make sure to periodically check the wires; they should not be warm to the touch. Do not leave holiday lights on unattended.

- **Holiday Decorations**

Use only nonflammable decorations. All decorations should be nonflammable or flame-retardant and placed away from heat vents. Never put wrapping paper in a fireplace, because it can result in a very large fire, throwing off dangerous sparks and embers and may result in a chimney fire.

- **Candle Care**

Avoid using lit candles but if used, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave the house with candles burning. Never put lit candles on a tree. Do not go near a Christmas tree with an open flame - candles, lighters or matches.

Finally, as in every season, have working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home, test them monthly and keep them clean and equipped with fresh batteries at all times. Know when and how to call for help. And remember to practice a home escape plan.

### **Toy Related Accidents**

As the holidays approach and toy catalogs begin to arrive in the mail, toy shoppers can become overwhelmed with all the choices. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has placed safeguards in recent years to increase the safety of toys.

The new toy safeguards include: establishing the lowest lead content and lead paint limits in the world; setting limits on the use of certain toxins; converting the voluntary toy standard into a mandatory standard; and working with Customs and Border Protection data systems to track shipments as they are in transit from other countries thereby increasing effectiveness in discovering dangerous products coming into U.S. ports.

These safeguards, along with safety-conscious steps taken by many toy makers and sellers, have contributed to a dramatic decline in toy recalls since 2008. In addition to a decline in recalls, toy-related fatalities decreased in 2009. In 2009 CPSC received reports of 12 deaths to children under the age of 15, which is down from 24 toy-related fatalities in 2007 and 2008. Riding toys were associated with almost 60 percent of the reported deaths in 2009. Most deaths were from drowning, motor vehicle accidents, or airway obstruction from a small toy or small part of a toy.

While recalls and deaths have declined, new statistics from CPSC show that toy-related injuries are increasing. In 2009, there were an estimated 186,000 emergency room-treated injuries related to toys with children younger than 15, which is up from 152,000 injuries in 2005. Frequently these injuries involved lacerations, contusions, and abrasions that most often

occurred to a child's face and head. Importantly many of the incidents were associated with, but not necessarily caused by, a toy.

The following are tips to help prevent toy-related injuries:

- Always choose age appropriate toys.
- Include safety gear whenever shopping for sports-related gifts or ride-on toys, including bicycles, skates, and scooters.
- Be aware of your child's surroundings during play. Young children should avoid playing with ride-on toys near or in traffic, pools or ponds. They also should avoid playing in indoor areas associated with hazards such as kitchens and bathrooms and in rooms with corded window blinds.

Here are some additional safety steps that consumers can take while shopping this holiday season:

- Riding toys, skateboards, and in-line skates travel fast, and falls could be deadly. Helmets and safety gear should be worn properly at all times and be sized to fit.
- For children younger than age three, avoid toys with small parts, which can cause choking.
- Children can choke or suffocate on deflated or broken balloons. Keep deflated balloons away from children younger than eight years old.
- For children under age six, avoid play sets with small magnets. If magnets or pieces with magnets are swallowed, serious injuries and/or death can occur.
- Once the gifts are open:
  - Immediately discard plastic wrappings or other packaging on toys before

they become dangerous play things.

- Keep toys appropriate for older children away from younger siblings.
- Charging batteries should be supervised by adults. Chargers and adapters can pose thermal burn hazards to young children.
- Pay attention to instructions and warnings on battery chargers. Some chargers lack any mechanism to prevent overcharging.

### **Sport Related Injuries**

People spend hours of recreation time on activities ranging from sledding, snow skiing and tobogganing to ice hockey, ice skating and snowboarding. According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS), however, if the proper precautions are not taken to ensure warmth and safety, severe injuries can occur. Winter sports injuries get a lot of attention at hospital emergency rooms, doctors' offices and clinics. Injuries include sprains and strains, dislocations and fractures. Many winter sports injuries happen at the end of the day, when people overexert themselves to finish that one last run before the day's end. A majority of these injuries can easily be prevented if participants prepare for their sport by keeping in good physical condition, staying alert and stopping when they are tired or in pain. The following steps can be taken to prevent injuries related to winter sports this holiday season.

- Never participate alone in a winter sport.
- Keep in shape and condition muscles before participating in winter activities.
- Warm up thoroughly before playing. Cold muscles, tendons

and ligaments are vulnerable to injury.

- Wear appropriate protective gear, including goggles, helmets, gloves and padding.
- Check that equipment is in good working order and used properly.
- Wear several layers of light, loose and water- and wind-resistant clothing for warmth and protection. Layering allows accommodation of the body's constantly changing temperature. Wear proper footwear that provides warmth and dryness, as well as ample ankle support.
- Know and abide by all rules of the sport in which you are participating.
- Take a lesson (or several) from a qualified instructor, especially in sports like skiing and snowboarding. Learning how to fall correctly and safely can reduce the risk of injury.
- Pay attention to warnings about upcoming storms and severe drops in temperature to ensure safety.
- Seek shelter and medical attention immediately if experiencing hypothermia or frostbite. Make sure everyone is aware of proper procedures for getting help, if injuries occur.
- Drink plenty of water before, during, and after activities.
- Avoid participating in sports when you are in pain or exhausted.

### **Food Related Accidents**

Food preparation is another key area in regards to holiday safety. Following these simple tips can prevent injuries, illness and death related to food during the holidays.

- Have a master plan. Consider refrigerator, freezer and oven space, and how to keep hot

foods at 140 degrees or higher and cold foods at 40 degrees or below.

- Cook to proper temperature and use a thermometer. There is simply no other way to determine that food has been cooked enough to kill bacteria. Turkeys, stuffing, side dishes, and all leftovers should be cooked to at least 165 degrees and kept above 140 degrees during serving to be sure that any potential bacteria is destroyed. Remember the golden rule: Keep hot food hot and cold food cold.
- Refrigerate leftovers within two hours of preparation. Leaving food out too long is one of the biggest holiday food safety problems.
- Properly defrost your turkey, or buy a fresh one. Allocate 24 hours per 5 pounds to defrost a frozen turkey in the refrigerator; don't defrost on the kitchen counter.
- Wash hands thoroughly and often; before, during, and after food preparation. Wash with hot water and soap, up to the wrists and between the fingers, for approximately 20 seconds.
- Wash all fresh produce. Wash even prepackaged greens, to minimize potential bacterial contamination. Make sure kitchen counters, sponges, cutting boards, and knives are all well-scrubbed.
- Keep guests (and sticky fingers) out of the kitchen. Holidays occur during cold and flu season, which further compounds the fact that about half of all people have staph aureus bacteria on their fingertips. It is important to prevent anyone from picking at the food while it is being prepared. Serving simple appetizers to give guest

something to nibble on until the meal is ready can reduce sticky fingers in the kitchen.

Another important kitchen safety rule is to keep an eye on children. Make sure children stay out of the kitchen when there are hot items on the stove. This is a key step to prevent life threatening burns during the holiday season.

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\*\*If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu).  
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The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu). Produced by Helen Grimes, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.