

Childproof the Holidays

Shopping. Baking. Decorating. Life gets hectic during the holidays. But whatever else you have on that to-do list put this first: 1. Childproof the house! Children, especially those under the age of five, see Christmas trees, Menorahs, ornaments and candles as mysterious and magical things. They want to touch, chew and play with them. But if children get a hold of the wrong objects, they can be seriously injured. Don't spend your holidays in the emergency room. Take a few precautionary steps now to protect your children so they, too, can enjoy the season.

When your kids smell the aroma of baking cookies, fruitcakes and Yule logs, they naturally want to be in the kitchen. But unless you can supervise them carefully, keep them out. The kitchen is one of the most dangerous rooms in your home.

But just in case your kids do sneak into the kitchen when you're not looking:

- Keep hot foods and beverages away from the edges of counters and tables and don't place them on top of tablecloths or place mats.
- Unplug the beater or other electrical appliances, wrap up the cords and put them away. Your children should not have access to any live' electrical appliance cords. Also, place covers over all electrical outlets. Both cords and outlets are sources of electric shock.
- Use back burners and turn pot handles toward the back of the stove when cooking.
- Put guards on stove knobs so your children cannot turn them on when you're not looking.

As you know, children can get hurt in any room of the house, not just the kitchen. So for their protection:

- Don't let children under four have hard candies, nuts or similar seasonal foods. Hard, round foods such as candies, nuts, grapes, popcorn, raw carrots and even raisins can get lodged in children's throats and block the passage of air through their windpipes.
- Pick up after yourself once you've finished making holiday decorations. Small crafting items such as safety pins, buttons and tacks should not be left within your children's reach because they can swallow and choke on them.
- Don't display any decoration that can easily break or has sharp edges. Place glass ornaments, for example, far out of the reach of small children. They could grab, drop, break them and then cut themselves on the shattered pieces. Also, don't use decorations with tiny pieces that can be swallowed. And avoid trimmings that look like candy or food because a child might try to eat them. Put ornaments high up on the Christmas tree out of your children's reach.
- Place your Christmas Tree in a sturdy stand and anchor it down so your children cannot knock it over.
- Keep children away from tree lights and other electrical decorations. These items can shock or electrocute curious kids. Lights are also a fire hazard. So keep them away from gifts, paper ornaments, curtains and drapes. If you have very small children, you might consider skipping the electrical lights on your Christmas tree.

- Keep Menorahs and other candle-holders and candle decorations well out of the reach of children. Flickering flames fascinate young ones, and they can easily burn themselves or start fires.
- Choose toys for infants and small children with care. Make certain that what you give them is too big, and has parts that are too big, to get caught in their throats, noses or ears. Also avoid toys with sharp points, sharp edges, strings and cords. And don't give older children toys that might be dangerous to their younger siblings.
- Keep holly and mistletoe out of the reach of children. They are poisonous and can be fatal to a small child. Poinsettia leaves are not fatal if swallowed, but can cause a skin rash and severe upset stomachs. If a child ingests any of these holiday plants, call 911 immediately.
- Purchase tree tinsel or artificial icicles made of non-leaded material. Leaded materials are sometimes poisonous.
- Keep fire salts out of the reach of your children. These salts produce pretty colored flames when thrown on wood fires, but they contain heavy metals that can cause vomiting if ingested.
- Don't buy your kids electric toys that are not UL/FM approved.
- Keep alcoholic beverages out of the reach of your children. A child does not have to drink much to get alcohol poisoning. Remember to clean-up half-empty glasses after a party.
- Learn CPR and First Aid.

During the holidays, you should also take extra care to protect those 'kids' who have four legs and a tail. Pets are susceptible to many of the same holiday dangers as children. Take the same precautions in the holiday season to protect your pet as you do to protect your children.

Also:

- Refrain from using chemical sprays that extend the life of your Christmas tree. Some of them are poisonous and can be fatal to your pet.
- Don't feed your pet candy, especially chocolate, no matter how hard he begs. Chocolate is toxic to animals and can induce vomiting, restlessness, heart palpitations, or death. And make sure you tell your children not to share candy with the family pet.
- Don't give your dog poultry bones, which can splinter and cause digestive problems or even death.
- Don't feed your pets too much people food, which can upset their stomachs. Instead, give them some of their favorite dog or cat treats during special meals.
- Don't give your pets toys made of small parts or soft materials that they can chew up and swallow.
- Don't put catnip or other edibles in hanging stockings, especially ones by a fireplace.
- Shut pets in a room away from parties and family gatherings. Left out, a pet may become stressed and escape through the front door as guests arrive and depart. Don't give your pets alcoholic beverages. They don't have the body mass to adjust to alcohol's effects, and too much can be fatal.

Some of the safety tips on keeping your children safe at home were provided by the National Safe Kids Campaign. For more information on keeping your children safe, contact the National Safe Kids Campaign in Washington, DC.