



Jeb Bush
Governor

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Secretary, Department of Health

PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Information for Parents and Others Who Care for Children:

Making the Holidays Safe

Family gatherings, special traditions, delicious treats - it just may be the most wonderful time of the year, especially for children. Unfortunately, for emergency room doctors it's also one of the busiest. Take time out to learn how to protect your little ones from some common holiday dangers, and you and your family can enjoy a season that's not only happy but healthy. Here are some tips from KidsHealth and the **Pinellas County Health Department** for a safe and healthy holiday season:

Poisoning

- Mistletoe, holly, poinsettias and other plants are commonly used as decorations during the holidays. Like many plants, these are considered potentially poisonous and should be kept out of the reach of children. Symptoms of plant poisoning can include rashes, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. If you suspect that your child has eaten any part of a plant, immediately call your child's doctor or the national poison control number: **(800) 222-1222**.
- "Bubble lights" containing methylene chloride can be poisonous if a child drinks the fluid from more than one light (even if it is labeled nontoxic).
- Alcohol poisoning is a common risk for children during the holiday season. Many parents host holiday parties where alcohol is served. Parents must take care to remove all empty and partially empty cups as soon as possible. Because children imitate adults, many may drink the beverages they see adults drinking. Children become "drunk" much more quickly than adults, so even small amounts of alcohol can be dangerous to children.
- Food poisoning is another potential holiday hazard. Practice food safety by washing hands, utensils, dishes, and anything else that comes in contact with raw meat, including poultry and fish, and raw eggs before and after use. Don't contaminate a serving dish with raw meat. Store leftovers properly and heat them thoroughly before serving.

Choking and Swallowing

- Tree ornaments, light bulbs, icicles, tinsel, and small toys are potential choking hazards for small children because they may block the airway. The general rule of thumb is that if it's small enough to fit in the mouths of babies and toddlers, it's too small to play with.
- Common holiday foods such as peanuts or popcorn are potential choking hazards and should not be given to children under age four.

(MORE)



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- The needles of holiday trees can cause painful cuts in the mouth and throat of a child who swallows them.
- Angel hair (made from finely spun glass) and ornament hangers may cause cuts, skin irritation, or eye damage if touched or swallowed by children.

Fire

- Keep your tree secured in a sturdy stand so that it can't tip over (or be knocked over by small children or pets) and keep it away from all heat sources such as electrical outlets, radiators, and portable space heaters. If you buy an artificial tree, be sure that it is labeled "fire-retardant." Unplug all lights, both indoor and outdoor, and extinguish all candles every night before you go to bed.
- Never leave the room with single candles or menorah candles burning - it only takes a minute for a spark from a candle to burst into flames. Keep live candles away from windowsills and mantles and use only flame-retardant decorations when decking your halls.
- Circuits that are overloaded with lights, decorations, and accessories can start a fire. Don't overload indoor or outdoor electrical outlets.
- You can protect your family by using a sturdy fireplace screen when burning fires. Never burn paper or pine boughs, since those materials can float out of the chimney and ignite a nearby home.
- Have a family emergency plan in the event of a fire, and check smoke detectors before you put up your holiday decorations. These steps will ensure that your family will be able to celebrate many holiday seasons to come.

Accidents

- There is a lot of cooking going on during the holiday season; as a result, there are a lot of opportunities for burns and scaldings. Keep pot handles turned away from the front of the stove and always keep the oven door closed. Watch your children while you are baking or cooking in order to prevent accidents.
- Keep breakable ornaments out of your young children's reach - or keep them off the tree until your children are older. If an ornament does break, clean up the broken glass quickly.
- Parents can prevent a holiday ER visit by making sure the kids are buckled up securely during car rides and by not driving after drinking alcohol. In addition, be wary when traveling during the evenings of holidays such as Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, since there is a higher incidence of drunk driving accidents on these days.

This information was provided with permission by KidsHealth, one of the largest resources online for medically reviewed health information written for parents, kids, and teens.

For more articles like this one, visit www.KidsHealth.org or www.TeensHealth.org.

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