

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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Holiday season puts kids at greater risk of injury, UT Southwestern experts offer safety tips

DALLAS – Nov. 30, 2004 – The holidays can be a joyous time of year, filled with beautiful home décor, parties with friends and visits to family homes. But this time of year can also be dangerous to children if caregivers or party hosts forget to take proper precautions, according to experts at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

“Most of the hazards of Christmas are the same hazards we see that threaten children all year round, but the holiday season puts kids at greater risk,” said Dr. Robert Wiebe, professor of pediatrics and the division chief of pediatric emergency medicine. “With the excitement of the season, parents who are otherwise careful may not always remember to think about choking, ingestion or safety dangers.”

UT Southwestern experts offer the following advice:

On décor...

- Small lights, tiny ornaments and pine needles on Christmas trees, garlands and wreaths can be a choking hazard. Keep anything that fits in a child’s mouth well out of reach.
- Strands of holiday lights and other electric decorations can be electrocution hazards. Don’t overload outlets and use only electrical equipment that has been approved by the Underwriter’s Laboratory. Also inspect all cords for damage that might have occurred during storage.
- Candles, which are more common during the holidays, increase the risk of fire. Keep them out of reach of children and be sure to dress toddlers in flame-retardant clothing.
- Perfumed oil lamps, especially those that smell like food, are often very attractive to small children. Keep them out of reach because the oil could cause severe aspiration pneumonia if swallowed.
- Plants can become dangerous if children decided to eat them in large quantities. Holly can cause skin inflammation and an upset stomach. Mistletoe can be toxic to the heart, and poinsettias can cause gastrointestinal irritation. Call poison control if a child has

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decided to have these items for dessert.

On trips...

- Grandparents who will be hosting visits with little ones should make sure their house is safe. Experts recommend investing in cabinet locks, outlet covers, cook on the back burners and, if there is a pool, make absolutely certain that the area is inaccessible.
- When visiting elderly relatives, make sure children cannot get into medications that may be kept on counters, in cabinets and by the bed. Also, don't forget the medicine in Grandmother's purse.
- Don't forget to supervise kids around pets. Even those that are ordinarily friendly to children could bite because they are overwhelmed by the disruptions of normal routines, extra activity in the house and loud noises.
- When flying, be sure to use an approved car seat on the plane. While children younger than 2 are allowed to fly on an adults lap, the National Safe Kids Campaign recommends children who weigh 40 pounds or less use safety seats. The seats will be needed anyway once you land because most states require that kids be restrained in cars and taxis.

On toys...

- Children often can't wait to get outside to try new bikes or scooters. Before they rush out the door, make sure they are wearing helmets and have received safety instructions. Once outside, keep them away from high-traffic areas and supervise them as they take their maiden voyage.
- Make sure toys given as gifts are appropriate for the child's age and developmental stage. And, keep toddlers in mind even when giving a gift to their older siblings. "When you give a toy to one child, you are giving it to the entire family," said Dr. Susan Scott, assistant professor of pediatrics with expertise in injury prevention.

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