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Safe & Secure

Making the Holidays Safe

Family gatherings, special traditions, delicious treats — the holiday season may be the most wonderful time of the year, especially for kids. Unfortunately, for emergency room doctors it's also one of the busiest.

Learn how to protect your little ones from some common holiday dangers, so you and your family can enjoy a season that's happy and healthy.

Poisoning

- **Poisonous Plants.** Mistletoe, holly, poinsettias, Jerusalem cherry plants, 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.
- **Alcohol Poisoning.** Alcohol is a common risk for children during the holiday season. Many parents host holiday parties where alcohol is served. 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.
- **Food Poisoning.** This is another potential holiday hazard. Practice food safety by washing hands, utensils, dishes, and anything else that comes in contact with raw meat.

Choking and Swallowing

- **Decorations.** 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. Ornament hooks made of metal may cause cuts, skin irritation, or eye damage if touched or swallowed by children.
- **Holiday Food.** Common holiday foods such as peanuts or popcorn are potential choking hazards and should not be given to children under age 4.
- **Christmas Trees.** The needles of holiday trees can cause painful cuts in the mouth and throat of a child who swallows them.





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Fire

- **Christmas Tree.** Keep your tree secured in a sturdy stand so that it doesn't tip over (or isn't knocked over by kids 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 it's labeled "fire-retardant."
- **Christmas Lights.** Unplug all lights, both indoor and outdoor every night before you go to bed.
- **Candles.** Avoid using real candles on a tree because if the needles are dry, they can easily catch fire. If you light candles in your home, be sure to extinguish them before bed.
- **Electrical issues.** Circuits that are overloaded with lights, decorations, and accessories can start a fire. Don't overload indoor or outdoor electrical outlets.

Accidents

- **Cooking.** A lot of cooking goes on during the holiday season, so there are many opportunities for burns and scalding's. Keep pot handles turned away from the front of the stove and always keep the oven door closed. To prevent accidents, watch your children while you bake or cook. Kitchen appliances should be clean to prevent potential fires.
- **Decorations.** Keep breakable ornaments out of young children's reach by hanging them at the top of the tree — or keep them off the tree until your children are older. If one does break, clean up the pieces quickly.

