

Keep Your Family Safe

Fire Safety and Burn Prevention at Home



Fires and burns cause almost 4,000 deaths and about 20,000 hospitalizations every year. Winter is an especially dangerous time, as space heaters, fireplaces, and candles get more use in the home. It is no surprise that fires in the home are more common between December and February. However, you might be surprised at how easy it is to reduce the risk of fire in your home. Follow these suggestions to help keep your home and family safe from fire all year round.

Smoke alarms save lives

Half of home fire deaths are due to fires that happen while people are sleeping. One of the most important steps you can take to protect your family against fire is to install smoke alarms and keep them in good working order. You can buy smoke alarms at most home and hardware stores, and they often cost \$10 or less. Check with your fire department to see if they give out and install free smoke alarms.

- **Install** smoke alarms outside every bedroom or any area where someone sleeps. Also install them in furnace areas. Be sure there is at least 1 alarm on every level of your home, including the basement, or at each end of a mobile home.
- **Place** smoke alarms away from the kitchen and bathroom. False alarms can occur while cooking or even showering.
- **Test** smoke alarms every month by pushing the test button. It is best to use smoke alarms that have long-life batteries, but if you do not, change the batteries at least once a year, such as when you change your clocks in the fall.
- **Replace** smoke alarms every 10 years.
- **Never** paint a smoke alarm.
- **Clean** (dust or vacuum) smoke alarms once a month.
- **Use** smoke alarms equipped with a flashing light and an alarm in homes with children or adults who are hard of hearing or deaf.

Safety around the home

Take a careful look at each room of your home.

Use the following checklists and safety tips to reduce the risk of fire:

- **Do not smoke in your home.** If you do, use deep ashtrays and do not smoke in bed.
- **Make an escape plan.** Practice it every 6 months. Every member of the family should know at least 2 exits from each room and where to meet outside. Make sure doors and windows are easy to open to permit easy escape if needed.
- **Check electrical cords.** Replace any electrical cords that are worn, frayed, or damaged. Never overload outlets. Avoid running electrical cords under carpets or furniture because they can overheat and start a fire.

- **Consider installing an automatic home fire sprinkler system.** They are now practical for many homes.
- **Ask your local fire department to make sure woodstoves in your home are safely vented.** They usually cannot be installed safely in mobile homes.
- **Avoid using kerosene heaters and electric space heaters.** If electric space heaters must be used, keep them away from clothing, bedding, and curtains, and unplug them at night. Kerosene heaters give off carbon monoxide and should not be used in enclosed spaces, such as inside your home.

Bedrooms

- Check the labels of your child's pajamas. Children should always wear flame-retardant and/or close-fitting sleepwear.
- If a bedroom is on an upper floor, make sure there is a safe way to reach the ground, such as an escape ladder that will not burn.
 - ◆ *Never smoke in bed or when you are drowsy or have been drinking. Tobacco and smoking products, matches, and lighters are the most common cause of fatal fires in the home.*

Living and family rooms

Make sure all matches, lighters, and ashtrays are out of your child's sight and reach. Better yet, keep them in a locked cabinet.

- Use large, deep ashtrays that won't tip over, and empty them often. Fill ashtrays with water before dumping ashes in the wastebasket.
- Give space heaters plenty of space. Keep heaters at least 3 feet from anything that might burn, like clothes, curtains, and furniture. Always turn space heaters off and unplug them when you go to bed or leave the home.
- Have fireplaces and chimneys cleaned and inspected once a year.
- Use a metal screen or glass doors in front of the fireplace.
 - ◆ *Never leave a room unattended when candles, heaters, or fireplaces are in use.*

Kitchen

- Keep your stove and oven clean and free of anything that could catch fire. Do not place pot holders, curtains, or towels near the burners.
- Install a portable fire extinguisher in the kitchen, high on a wall, and near an exit. (Choose a multipurpose, dry chemical extinguisher.) Adults should know how to use it properly when the fire is small and contained, such as in a trash can. Call your fire department for information on how to use fire extinguishers.
 - ◆ *Never leave cooking food unattended.*

- ◆ *Never pour water on a grease fire.*
- ◆ *If a fire starts in your oven, keep the oven door closed, turn off the oven, and call the fire department.*

Garage, storage area, and basement

- Have your furnace inspected at least once a year.
- Do not store anything near a heater or furnace. Keep the area free of clutter.
- Clean your dryer's lint filter after every use. Lint buildup can start a fire.
- Check to make sure paint and other flammable liquids are stored in their original containers, with tight-fitting lids. Store them in a locked cabinet if possible, out of your child's reach, and away from appliances, heaters, pilot lights, and other sources of heat or flame.
- Never use flammable liquids near a gas water heater.
- Store gasoline, propane, and kerosene outside the home in a shed or detached garage. Keep them tightly sealed and labeled in approved safety containers.
 - ◆ *Gasoline should be used only as a motor fuel, never as a cleaning agent.*
 - ◆ *Never smoke near flammable liquids.*

Outdoors

- Move barbecue grills away from trees, bushes, shrubs, or anything that could catch fire. Never use grills indoors, on a porch, or on a balcony.
- Place a barrier around open fires, fire pits, or campfires. Never leave a child alone around the fire. Always be sure to put the fire out completely before leaving or going to sleep.
- Create a "fire break" around your home. Make sure woodpiles, dead leaves, pine needles, and debris are removed or kept as far away from the home as possible.
 - ◆ *Do not start lawnmowers, snow blowers, or motorcycles near gasoline fumes. Let motors cool off before adding fuel.*
 - ◆ *Be very careful with barbecue grills. Never use gasoline to start the fire. Do not add charcoal lighter fluid once the fire has started.*

Know what to do in a fire

- **Test any closed doors with the back of your hand for heat.** Do not open the door if you feel heat or see smoke. Close all doors as you leave each room to keep the fire from spreading.
- **Crawl low under smoke.** Choose the safest exit. If you must escape through a smoky area, remember that cleaner air is always near the floor. Teach your child to crawl on her hands and knees, keeping her head less than 2 feet above the floor, as she makes her way to the nearest exit.
- **Don't stop. Don't go back.** In case of fire, do not try to rescue pets or possessions. Once you are out, do not go back in for any reason. Firefighters have the best chance of rescuing people who are trapped. Let firefighters know right away if anyone is missing.
- **If you get trapped by smoke or flames,** close all doors. Stuff towels or clothing under the doors to keep out smoke. Cover your nose and mouth with a damp cloth to protect your lungs. If there is no phone in the room, wait at a window and signal for help with a light-colored cloth or flashlight.
- **Stop, drop, and roll! Cool and call.** Make sure your child knows what to do if her clothes catch fire.
 - Stop!*—Do not run.

Drop!—Drop to the ground right where you are.

Roll!—Roll over and over to put out the flames. Cover your face with your hands.

Cool!—Cool the burned area with water.

Call!—Call for help.

Fire and children

A child's curiosity about fire is natural and in most cases is no cause for concern. However, when a child begins to use fire as a weapon, it can be very dangerous. If you suspect that your child is setting even very small fires, address the problem right away. Talk with your pediatrician, who can suggest ways to help.

Use the following tips when talking with your child about preventing fires:

- Teach your child that matches and lighters are tools for grown-ups only.
- Older children should be taught to use fire properly, and only with an adult present.

For your sitters

When you are away from home and someone else cares for your children, make sure that your children and the sitter will be just as safe as when you are there.

- Let your sitter know about your family's escape plan.
- Remind sitters never to leave the children alone.
- Remind sitters that you do not allow smoking in or around your home.

Leave emergency information near the phone. Include the local fire department phone number, your full home address and phone number, and a neighbor's name and phone number.

Burn prevention

Most burn injuries happen in the home. For a young child, many places in the home can be dangerous.

Hot bathwater, radiators, and even food that is too hot can cause burns. The following are tips to help prevent your child from getting burned:

- Keep matches, lighters, and ashtrays out of the reach of children.
- Cover all unused electrical outlets with plastic plugs or other types of outlet covers.
- Do not allow your child to play close to fireplaces, radiators, or space heaters.
- Replace all frayed, broken, or worn electrical cords.
- Never leave barbecue grills unattended.
- Teach your children that irons, curling irons, grills, radiators, and ovens can get very hot and are dangerous to touch or play near. Never leave these items unattended. Unplug and put away all appliances after using them.
- Keep electrical cords from hanging down where children can pull on them or chew on them. Mouth burns can result from chewing on a live extension cord or on a poorly insulated wire.

Kitchen concerns

- Never leave a child alone in the kitchen when food is cooking.
- Enforce a "kid-free" zone at least 3 feet around the oven or stove while you are cooking. Use a playpen, high chair, or other stationary device to keep your child from getting too close.

- Never leave a hot oven door open.
- Use back burners if possible. When using front burners, turn pot handles rearward. Never let them stick out where a child could grab them.
- Do not leave spoons or other utensils in pots while cooking.
- Turn off burners and ovens when they are not being used.
- Do not use wet pot holders because they may cause steam burns.
- Carefully place (not toss) wet foods into a deep fryer or frying pan containing grease. The reaction between hot oil and water causes splatter.
- Remove pot lids carefully to avoid being burned by steam. Remember, steam is hotter than boiling water.
- In case of a small pan fire, carefully slide a lid over the pan to smother the flames, turn off the burner, and wait for the pan to cool completely.
- Never carry your child and hot liquids at the same time.
- Never leave hot liquid, like a cup of coffee, where children can reach it. Don't forget that a child can get burned from hot liquids by pulling on hanging tablecloths.
- Wear tight-fitting or rolled-up sleeves when cooking to reduce the risk of your clothes catching on fire.
- In microwave ovens, use only containers that are made for microwaves. Test microwaved food for heat and steam before giving it to your child. (Never warm a bottle of milk or formula in the microwave oven. It can heat the liquid unevenly and burn your child.)
- Avoid letting appliance cords hang over the sides of countertops, where children could pull on them.
- Do not use mobile baby walkers. They allow your child to move quickly before he knows how to use this mobility safely. It may allow him to gain access to hot liquids, appliance cords, and hot surfaces.

Hot water

- The hottest water temperature at the faucet should be no higher than 120°F to prevent scalding. In many cases, you can adjust your water heater to prevent exceeding this temperature.
- When using tap water, always turn on the cold water first, then add hot. When finished, turn off the hot water first.
- Test the temperature of bathwater with your forearm or the back of your hand before placing your child in the water.
- Use a cool-mist vaporizer instead of a hot-water vaporizer. Hot-water vaporizers can cause steam burns or can spill on your child.
- Never leave children alone in the bathroom for any reason. They are at risk of burns and drowning.

First aid for burns

For severe burns, call 911 or your local emergency number right away. Until help arrives, follow these steps.

1. Cool the burn.

For 1st and 2nd degree burns, cool the burned area with cool running water for a few minutes. This helps stop the burning process, numbs the pain, and prevents or reduces swelling. Do not use ice on a burn. It may delay healing. Also, do not rub a burn; it can increase blistering.

For 3rd degree burns, cool the burn with wet, sterile dressings until help arrives.

2. Remove burned clothing.

Lay the person flat on her back and take off the burned clothing that isn't stuck to the skin. Remove any jewelry or tight-fitting clothing from around the burned area before swelling begins. If possible, elevate the injured area.

3. Cover the burn.

After the burn has cooled, cover it loosely with a dry bandage or clean cloth. Do not break any blisters. This could allow bacteria into the wound. Never put grease (including butter or medical ointments) on the burn. Grease holds in heat, which may make the burn worse. It also makes the burn harder to examine by medical personnel later.

4. Keep the child from losing body heat.

Keep the person's body temperature normal. Cover unburned areas with a dry blanket.

Fire drills—be prepared!

Even young children (3 and older) can begin to learn what to do in case of a fire.

Install at least 1 smoke alarm on every level of your home.

Have an escape plan and practice it with your family. This will help you and your family reach safety when it counts. When a fire occurs, there will be no time for planning an escape.

Draw a floor plan of your home. Discuss with your family 2 ways to exit every room. Make sure everyone knows how to get out and that doors and windows can be easily opened to permit escape.

If you live in an apartment building, never use an elevator during a fire. Use the stairs!

Agree on a meeting place. Choose a spot outside your home near a tree, street corner or fence where everyone can meet after escaping. Teach your children that the sound of a smoke alarm means to go outside right away to the chosen place.

Know how to call the fire department. The fire department should be called from outside using a portable phone or from a neighbor's home. Whether the number is 911 or a regular phone number, everyone in the family should know it by heart. Make sure your children know your home address too. Teach your children that firefighters are friends and never to hide from them.

Practice, practice, practice. Practice your exit drill at least twice a year. Remember that fire drills are not a race. Get out quickly, but calmly and carefully. Try practicing realistic situations. Pretend that some exits or doorways are blocked or that the lights are out. The more prepared your family is, the better your chances of surviving a fire.

Note: Parents of very young children or children with special needs should have a safety plan that fits their child's needs and abilities. For example, a child who is hard of hearing or deaf may need a smoke alarm with a flashing strobe-light feature. Parents with children younger than 5 years must plan on an adult rescuing them in the case of a house fire; they are too young to be able to reliably rescue themselves.

Different degrees of burns

Following are the 4 different levels of burns and the symptoms of each:

1st degree burns are minor and heal quickly. Symptoms are redness, tenderness, and soreness (like most sunburns).

2nd degree burns are serious injuries. First aid and medical treatment should be given as soon as possible. Symptoms are blistering (like a severe sunburn), pain, and swelling.

3rd degree burns (also called full-thickness burns) are severe injuries. Medical treatment is needed right away. Symptoms are white, brown, or charred tissue often surrounded by blistered areas. There may be little or no pain at first.

4th degree burns are severe injuries that involve skin, muscle, and bone. These often occur with electrical burns and may be more severe than they appear. They may cause serious complications and should be treated by a doctor right away.

Call your pediatrician if your child suffers anything more than a minor burn. ALL electrical burns and any burn on the hand, foot, face, genitals, or over a joint worse than 1st degree should receive medical attention right away.

From your doctor

Adapted from material provided by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). For more information, call 617/770-3000, or visit the NFPA Web site at www.nfpa.org or its family Web site at www.sparky.org.

Please note: Listing of resources does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned in this publication. Phone numbers and Web site addresses are as current as possible, but may change at any time.

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