



HOLIDAY SAFETY

The Issue

Holidays are busy and joyous times for most Canadians. But holiday routines can also give rise to greater safety hazards than would normally occur.

Background

Candles on the table and a tree decorated with lights are part of the holiday season in Canada. However, these traditions involve some safety risks not often found at other times of the year.

The Health and Safety Risks of Holiday Practices

Blazing fireplaces, a dry evergreen tree, faulty ornamental lights, unsafe sleepwear designs and candles left unattended can all pose fire hazards.

Toys inappropriate to a child's age or those that contain small, loose parts and packaging materials can all prove harmful to young children. They can choke on small parts, suffocate in packaging materials or be seriously injured if a toy is not suited to their age.

Minimizing Your Risk

Here are some tips to help you enjoy a safe and happy holiday.

Toys and gifts

- Choose toys that are appropriate to the child's age. Be sure to read and follow all warnings and instructions that come with the toy.
- Toys with small loose parts can be dangerous for children under three years of age. Keep them out of reach.
- Make sure batteries in toys are properly installed and not accessible to the child. Do not let children take battery-operated toys to bed.

- Dispose of all packing materials such as Styrofoam pellets, ties, plastic bags and wrapping as soon as possible. Children can choke or suffocate on them.
- Before using a cosmetic gift for the first time, rub a small amount on the back of your hand and leave it for a couple of hours. Redness or swelling may indicate that you have an allergy to the product and should not use it.
- Put cosmetic products away after opening them. Some cosmetics are toxic to young children.
- For fire safety, when buying sleepwear for children, be sure to choose items made of nylon, polyester, or snug-fitting cotton or cotton blend fabrics.

Candles

- Never leave burning candles unattended.
- Keep burning candles out of the reach of children and away from pets, tree decorations or wrapping paper.
- Cut candle wicks short to prevent a high flame.
- If candles are used in a centerpiece, make sure they don't burn low enough to ignite the decorations.
- Use sturdy candle holders that won't easily tip over.

Holiday trees

- When buying a real tree, check that it is fresh (needles are hard to pull off). Water the tree daily. Trees can consume up to four litres of water a day. Store the tree in a cool, sheltered area until it is brought indoors for decorating. If it will be several days before it is brought indoors, store it outdoors or on a cool porch or patio. Protect the tree from wind and sun to help it retain its moisture.
- Make sure the tree is well-secured in a sturdy stand.
- Place the tree away from high traffic areas, doorways, heating vents, radiators, stoves, fireplaces and burning candles.



- Keep metal tree ornaments and decorations away from young children. Metal decorations may contain lead that can be harmful to young children if they put them in their mouths.
- If young children are around, avoid decorations that are sharp, breakable or have small removable parts, or put those decorations at the top of the tree.
- Remove the tree right after the holidays or as soon as the needles start to fall. Dispose of it according to local regulations. Many municipalities have tree-recycling programs.

Holiday lights

- When decorating your home, only use lights that have been certified by a recognized organization - CSA, ULC or cUL.
- Make sure you use indoor lights inside your home and outdoor lights outside.
- Check all light bulbs before you put them up and replace broken or burned-out bulbs with those recommended by the manufacturer.
- Check the light strings and extension cords you use, discarding any that are frayed or have exposed wires, loose connections or broken light sockets. Never run electrical cords through doorways or under carpets.
- Do not overload electrical outlets. Use more than one outlet if the wattage of your lights is more than the outlet can handle.
- Keep bubbling lights away from children. They contain a hazardous chemical which can cause irritation or chemical burns if the bulb breaks and the chemical is released.
- Turn off all holiday lights before you go to bed or leave your home.

Fireplaces and wood stoves

- Always use a secure screen in front of your fireplace.
- Have the chimney cleaned at least once a year.
- Burn hardwood which will leave less creosote in the chimney.

- If using firelogs, follow the manufacturer's instructions. Use only one log at a time.
- Make sure the fire is out before going to bed or before going out.
- Ensure that the chimney is drawing well so that wood smoke does not come into the room.
- Keep children away from gas fireplaces. When in use, the glass doors can become hot enough to cause serious burns.

General household safety

- If young children are going to be visiting over the holidays, make sure your house is safe for them by covering electrical outlets, barring stairwells and removing furniture and decorations that may be hazardous to children.
- Keep all cosmetics such as perfume, aftershave and nail polish remover, as well as all medications and household chemical products, out of the sight and reach of children and away from heat sources.
- Keep all lighters and matches out of the reach and sight of children.
- Decorations and candles that look or smell like food or candy should be kept out of children's reach. They may be attractive to a child, but may be poisonous or cause choking.
- Maintain smoke detectors in good working order.

For more on toy safety, candles and wood smoke, see the links in the Need More Info? section.

Health Canada's Role

Health Canada administers and enforces the Hazardous Products Act (HPA). Health Canada monitors the marketplace and takes action on products that do not meet the safety requirements established by this legislation. Potentially hazardous toys and other types of products identified through inspections, consumer complaints or trade complaints are evaluated at the Product Safety Laboratory.

Need More Info?

If you would like more information, contact your nearest Health Canada Product Safety Office:

(English) regional offices
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/cps/contact.htm>

(French) regional offices
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/spc/contact.htm>

Or call (613) 952-1014 and ask for the telephone number of the Health Canada Product Safety Office nearest you.

It's Your Health

- Toy Safety (<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/products/toys.html>)
- Candle Safety (<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/products/candles.html>)
- Wood Smoke (<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/environment/woodsmoke.html>)

For additional articles, go to the It's Your Health Web site at:
<http://www.healthcanada.ca/iyh>