

Holiday safety tips from Community Care Physicians

The holidays are usually a time when parents are busy with all the activities of the season. During this time, it's important to be reminded of how to keep our children healthy and safe. Each year, about 111,000 children ages 14 and under are treated in hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries, according to the National SAFE KIDS Campaign. When purchasing toys, follow the recommended age ranges on the package. The ages listed are there for safety reasons, not to indicate whether a toy is developmentally appropriate for the child. Children can choke on small parts contained in toys or games. Before buying a toy, or allowing your child to play with a toy that he has received as a gift, read the instructions carefully. If the toy is appropriate for your child, show him or her how to use it properly.

Parents of children with asthma should be particularly aware of health risks during the holidays. Plush or furry toys made of animal fibers, wool, or feathers are always potential asthma triggers. Instead, purchase stuffed animals made up of synthetic materials and wash them regularly.

Holiday cookies and other treats may unexpectedly cause an allergic reaction that triggers an asthma attack. Examine the food carefully to see if it is healthy to give your child.

Many of us visit family and friends during the holidays. Remember that the homes you visit may not be childproofed. Keep an eye out for danger spots. Make sure that all medicines and household products are out of the reach of small children.

When decorating your own home, keep Christmas trees away from heat sources, such as fireplaces and radiators and out of traffic areas. Never use real candles on or near a tree. Avoid small, sharp or breakable holiday decorations around infants or toddlers. Keep decorative plants out of the reach of children. Only use the fireplace when you're home and awake. Extinguish the fire when you go out or at bedtime. Make sure you have functioning smoke detectors in your home.

Remember to clean up after a holiday party. A toddler could rise early and choke on leftover food or come in contact with alcohol or tobacco. Keep round, hard food and candies, such as candy cane, nuts and popcorn, out of reach of young children. Common baking ingredients such as vanilla and almond extract should be kept out of reach from children. The ingredients contain high levels of alcohol and may be harmful to young children if swallowed.

When you go to parties, be sure the sitter knows where you can be reached, the number of the police and fire department and your pediatrician, and how to contact the poison control center.

During this busy season it's important to remember that children can become overwhelmed with all the excitement. Spend time with your children baking cookies, reading holiday books or making decorations. Separate activities into stages: If children get bored with a project, let them walk away. Return to it later when the child is interested.

When family or friends gather, parents should still find time to spend with their children. Children don't always understand that you haven't seen your relatives or friends in a long time. Remind your children that the spirit of the holidays has nothing to do with the amount spent on gifts. One option is to have them make coupon books that include free services like doing the dishes, taking out the trash or getting the mail.

Try to balance your own expectations for the holidays. There's no way an over-hyped holiday can live up to everyone's expectations.

Remembering these tips can help your family have a relaxed and enjoyable holiday season. For more information please contact Susan Gauthier, Community Care Physicians' Wellness Concierge (783-3110 extension 3347) at the Capital Region Health Park in Latham. Community

Care Physicians Wellness Concierge is available to provide general health education information and to connect the public with health related services and programs across our community.