

## Holiday Hazards

### Food Safety:

- One of the major sources of holiday illness is food poisoning. Food borne illness often shows up as flu-like symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or fever. Age and physical condition place some persons at higher risk than others for any type of bacteria. Symptoms usually occur between 1 hour and 3 weeks after eating contaminated food.

**There are four basic food safety steps to help reduce the risk of food borne illness:**

- **CLEAN – wash hands and surfaces often**  
The kitchen, utensils, serving dishes and your hands should be cleaned before and after food handling.
- **SEPARATE – don't cross contaminate**  
Don't place cooked food on platters used to prepare raw food. Replace empty platters, rather than adding fresh food to a platter that has already had food on it.
- **COOK – cook to proper temperatures**  
Cook foods thoroughly and to safe temperatures. Serve in small, shallow containers. Reheat food to 165 F. Hot food should be held at 140 F or higher.
- **CHILL – refrigerate promptly**  
Keep cold foods on a bed of ice while serving. Cold foods should be held at 40 F. After the meal, refrigerate the foods as soon as possible. Food shouldn't sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Discard food left out past this time.

For more on food safety, check out [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)

### Toxic Decorations:

- Mistletoe and holly berries may be poisonous if swallowed.
- Lamp oils are colorful and attractive to children. If swallowed, these oils can be easily aspirated.
- Tinsel/icicles are non-toxic, but may cause airway or bowel obstruction. Old tinsel may contain lead.
- Glass ornaments are easily broken and may cause lacerations if swallowed.
- Fireplace color crystals are metallic chemicals that are irritating and may cause burns if swallowed.
- Poinsettia, thought by some to be toxic, is a very safe plant. It may cause varying degrees of irritation to the mouth and stomach if a large amount is ingested.
- Bubble lights are filled with alcohol or other solvents. Beware of broken glass if a child bites into a bulb. Eye and skin irritation may result from contact with the chemical. Some contain methylene chloride which may be harmful if swallowed.

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### Medications:

- There is no such thing as a childproof lid. Medicine bottle lids are only child-resistant. Keep all medicines locked up.
- Be aware when you are hosting visitors, or visiting other homes, of potential hazards to small children including medications that may not be in child resistant containers.
- Read labels carefully. Many cough and cold preparations have similar ingredients and also include analgesics such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen. Using more than one product may result in unintended double dosing due to the same or similar ingredients in different products.

### Miscellaneous:

- Pay special attention to toys with button batteries. They can be easily swallowed or inhaled. In the garage, items such as antifreeze, windshield washer fluid, and ice melts pose a risk to children and pets. Keep them out of reach of children. Remember that even a small amount of alcohol can be toxic to small children.

### Lights:

- Use the right lights for the right environment. Indoor light sets lack weatherproof connections. Many outdoor light sets burn too hot for indoor use.
- Inspect light sets before use. Check for cracked bulbs, broken or exposed wires and discard if faulty.
- Never leave a lit tree unattended.
- Never burn gift-wrappings, boxes, cartons, or other types of packing materials in fireplaces.
- Move Christmas stockings from the mantel when the fireplace is in use.
- Use properly sized screens to protect against flying sparks.
- Burn only seasoned and dried wood.
- Have the chimney cleaned annually or more often if used as a primary heat source.

- Remove ashes when cool and place in a metal container with a tight-fitting lid. Place the container outside, away from wooden decks or porches.

### Electrical Outlets:

- Avoid overloading wall outlets, even for short periods.
- Inspect all electrical cords before using and discard those with damage or frayed wires.
- Use only listed cords.
- Insert plugs fully into outlets. Poor contact can overheat the plug and wire.
- Do not coil or bunch an extension cord that is in use.
- Avoid placing cords beneath carpets or rugs.

### Portable Heaters

- Make sure portable heaters have been approved by a testing lab.
- Read and follow the manufacturer's operating instructions and keep the owner's manual available for reference.
- Avoid purchasing used portable heating equipment.
- When using unvented, fuel-fired heaters, never use gasoline and keep an adequate supply of fresh air. Consider installing carbon monoxide alarms.
- Keep all portable heaters at least 3 feet away from furniture and curtains. Never leave heaters operating unattended.
- Never use an extension cord to operate a space heater.

*In addition to these tips, make sure your home has working smoke alarms with fresh batteries..*