

The holidays should be a magical time for children.

Yet each year, hospital emergency rooms treat about 8700 people for injuries, such as falls, cuts and shocks, related to holiday lights, decorations and Christmas trees.

In addition, Christmas trees are involved in about 400 fires annually, resulting in 20 deaths, 70 injuries and an average of more than \$15 million in property loss and damage. Young children are particularly at risk for injury from sharp objects, such as glass ornaments, or from well-intentioned gifts of toys that are not appropriate to their age.

Keep the season merry with this list of safety tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Safer Trees and Decorations

- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant." Although this label does not mean the tree won't catch fire, it does indicate the tree will resist burning and should extinguish quickly.

- When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and when bent between your fingers, needles do not break. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.

- When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces and radiators. Because heated rooms dry live trees out rapidly, be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Place the tree out of the way of traffic and do not block doorways.

- Cut a few inches off the trunk of your tree to expose the fresh wood. This allows for better water absorption and will help to keep your tree from drying out and becoming a fire hazard.

- Use only noncombustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded metals. Leaded materials are hazardous if ingested by children.

- ❑ Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreens. Always use nonflammable holders and place candles out of children's reach.
- ❑ Take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children to avoid the child swallowing or inhaling small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food, which may tempt a child to eat them.
- ❑ Wear gloves to avoid eye and skin irritation while decorating with spun glass "angel hair." Follow container directions carefully to avoid lung irritation while decorating with artificial-snow sprays.

Bright Ideas for Lights

- ❑ Indoors or outside, always use lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory that indicates conformance with safety standards.
- ❑ Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections, and throw out damaged sets.
- ❑ Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord.
- ❑ Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
- ❑ Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use.
- ❑ Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use insulated staples to hold strings in place, not nails or tacks. Or run strings of lights through hooks (available at hardware stores).

