

# Keep Your Family Safe:

## Fire Safety and Burn Prevention at Home



Fires and burns cause more than 4,000 deaths and more than 50,000 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 most fires in the home occur 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 keep your home and family safe from fire all year round.

### Smoke alarms save lives

Most fatal fires in the home 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. Smoke alarms are available at most home and hardware stores and 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. Be sure there is at least one alarm on every level of your home 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.
- Change the batteries when they get low, or at least once a year such as when you change your clocks back in the fall.
- Replace smoke alarms every 10 years.
- Never paint a smoke alarm.
- Clean smoke alarms monthly by dusting or vacuuming.
- Smoke alarms with a flashing light and an alarm should be used in homes with hard-of-hearing or deaf children or adults.

### Prevention 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:

- Make an escape plan. Practice it every 6 months. Every member of the family should know at least two exits from each room and where to meet outside.
- Inspect and replace any electrical cords that are worn, frayed, or damaged. Never overload outlets. Avoid running electrical cords under carpet or furniture as they can overheat and start a fire.
- Make sure doors and windows are easy to open.
- Automatic home fire sprinkler systems are affordable and practical for many homes.
- Wood stoves usually cannot be safely installed in mobile homes. If one is present, it should be inspected by the local fire department to be sure it is safely vented.
- Avoid using alternative heating sources such as kerosene heaters and electric space heaters. If they must be used, keep them away from clothing, bedding, and curtains, and unplug them at night. If kerosene heaters must be used, make sure there is adequate ventilation to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.

### 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 a noncombustible escape ladder.
- In the event of 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.
- ❖ *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 children alone in a room with candles, heaters, or with a burning fireplace.*

### 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 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. Remove trash from the home.
- Clean your dryer vent 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.
- ❖ *Do not start lawnmowers, snowblowers, or motorcycles near gasoline fumes. Let small 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

- **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.
- **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.
- **Stop, drop, and roll! Cool and call**. Make sure your child knows what to do if his 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. Almost half of all people arrested for arson are under the age of 18. Fire setting by children may be a call for help or a way to oppose authority. A child who sets fires may have depression, stress, anger, or a sense of failure or may be acting out against abuse. Use the following tips when talking to 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 in the presence of an adult.

If you suspect that your child is setting even very small fires, address the problem right away. Discuss any problems in the child's life that may be causing the behavior. Listen carefully to what your child says. Some children may have trouble talking openly with a parent. Consult your pediatrician, who can suggest ways to help. Many schools and fire departments offer programs to help children who play with fires or set fires.

## For your sitters

When you are away from home and someone else cares for your children, take the following steps to ensure that your children and the sitter will be just as safe as when you are there.

- Let your sitter know where the safest exits are from your home. Discuss the family's escape plan.
- Tell the sitter where the outside meeting place is that the family has agreed upon in case of fire.

## Fire drills — be prepared!

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

1. **Install at least one smoke alarm** on every level of your home.
2. **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.
3. **Draw a floor plan of your home**. Discuss with your family two ways to exit every room. Make sure everyone knows how to get out and that doors and windows can be easily opened. *If you live in an apartment building, never use an elevator during a fire. Use the stairs!*
4. **Agree on a meeting place**. Choose a spot outside your home near a tree, street corner, fence, or mailbox where everyone can gather after escaping. Teach your children that the sound of a smoke alarm means to go outside right away and meet at the designated place.
5. **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.
6. **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 children with special needs should consider 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.

- Remind sitters *never* to leave the children alone.
- In case of fire, instruct the sitter to leave the house immediately with the children and call the fire department from a neighbor's house or an outside telephone.
- Remind sitters that you do not allow smoking in or around your home and children and not to bring matches or lighters into the home.
- Make sure to leave a list of emergency information near the phone. Include the following:
  - ❖ Local fire and police department phone numbers
  - ❖ Poison control center phone number
  - ❖ Your pediatrician's name and phone number
  - ❖ Where you can be reached
  - ❖ Children's full names
  - ❖ Your full home address and phone number (and, if you live in a rural area, any fire identifiers)
  - ❖ Neighbor's name and phone number
  - ❖ Any special instructions
- Provide your sitter with a copy of this brochure to read.

## Burn prevention

Most burn injuries happen in the home. For a young child, there are many ordinary places in the home that can be dangerous. Hot bath water, radiators, and even food that is too hot can cause burns. The following tips and suggestions will help you avoid the possibility of burn injury to your child:

- Keep matches, lighters, and ashtrays out of the reach of children.
- Childproof all electrical outlets with plastic plugs.
- 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 any of these items unattended with children near. Unplug all appliances after using them.

### Kitchen concerns

- *Never* leave a child alone in the kitchen when food is cooking.
- Enforce a “kid-free” zone 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 inward. 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, as they may cause steam burns.
- Carefully place wet foods into a deep fryer or frying pan containing grease rather than tossing them in. The reaction between hot oil and water will 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 liquids, like a cup of coffee, where children can reach them. 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 in the microwave. It can heat the liquid unevenly and burn your child.)
- Avoid letting appliance cords hang over the side of countertops, where children could pull on them.

### Hot water

- Lower the thermostat on your water heater so that the temperature at the tap is less than 120°F to prevent scalding.
- 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 bath water with your forearm or the back of your hand before placing your child in the water.
- Use a cool-mist vaporizer to treat upper-respiratory illnesses, as 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, immediately call 911 or your local emergency number. 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 10 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.*

### Different degrees of burns

Following are the four 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 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.
  - ❖ Deep 2nd and 3rd degree burns are called *full-thickness burns* and are very serious.
- **4th degree burns are severe injuries that involve both skin and underlying structures, such as 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 seen by a doctor immediately.

Remember to call your pediatrician if your child suffers anything more than a minor burn. ALL electrical burns and any burn on the hand, foot, face, or genitals should receive medical attention right away.

*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, apply a clean, dry gauze pad to the burned area. Do not break any blisters. This could allow germs into the wound.

*Never put grease (including butter or medical ointments) on the burn. Grease holds in heat, which may make the burn worse.*

#### 4. Treat for shock.

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

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](http://www.nfpa.org) or its family Web site at [www.sparky.org](http://www.sparky.org).

### From your doctor

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