

Holiday Safety Tips by State Compensation Insurance Fund



The following holiday safety tips are grouped into seven lists: Decorations, lighting, trees, food preparation, social activities, stress avoidance, and special considerations for children. If you would like more information on holiday safety, please see the links at the bottom of this page.

Safe Decorating Tips

- To reduce the risk of fire, never place your decorations near flames or electrical connections, and use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials.
- To avoid eye and skin irritation, wear gloves while decorating with spun glass "angel hair." For the safety of your lungs, be careful when applying artificial snow sprays.
- Exercise caution when you put up decorations in hard-to-reach places. Use a ladder to reach up, not a chair.
- If you have a fireplace, don't light it without first removing all greens, boughs, papers, and other decorations from the fireplace area. Check to see that the flue is open.

Displaying Candles and Lights

- Tips on candles: Keep them away from decorations and other combustible materials. Do not display in windows or near exits. Use non-flammable holders. Place them where they cannot be knocked down. Never leave burning candles unattended.
- Before you hang your lights on your tree, make sure all the bulbs work and that there are no frayed wires or broken sockets.
- Each single extension cord should carry no more than three standard-size sets of lights.
- When you go to bed or leave the house, turn off all holiday lights.
- Putting electric lights on a metallic tree can be dangerous. Don't do it.
- Before you install lights outdoors, be sure they are certified for outdoor use. Hold lights in place by stringing them through hooks or insulated staples, not nails or tacks. For additional shock protection, plug all outdoor lights and decorations into circuits with ground fault circuit interrupters.

Choosing and Maintaining Your Holiday Tree

- When purchasing an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled “Fire Resistant.”
- Tips for choosing a fresh tree: The needles do not separate from branches when bent between your fingers or when you tap the tree on the ground, and the trunk butt feels sticky with resin.
- Tips for setting up your tree: Position it away from fireplaces, heaters, and doorways. Keep the tree stand filled with water—for better absorption, cut a few inches off the trunk to expose the fresh wood. Maintaining your tree’s freshness reduces the risk of fire.
- After presents are opened, clear all wrapping papers from the tree and fireplace areas immediately. Never burn wrapping papers or evergreen branches in the fireplace.

Pass Around the Chocolate and the Pumpkin Pie: Tips for Handling Food

- Wash your hands and kitchen surfaces frequently. Also, thoroughly wash raw vegetables and fruits.
- Don’t cross-contaminate food. Keep raw foods and cooked foods separate, and use separate utensils when preparing them.
- Always thaw meat in the refrigerator, never on the countertop, and cook to proper temperatures.
- Refrigerate promptly. Don’t leave foods that require refrigeration at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers in covered shallow containers within two hours after cooking. Mark the containers with a date for future reference.

Tis the Season to be Jolly: Enjoying Social Activities Safely

- The holidays may be a time for festive eating and drinking, but for your own safety and health, do so in moderation.
- If you are hosting a party or small gathering, make non-alcoholic drinks available to your guests.
- Buckle up and drive defensively when you’re on the road. Always plan for and use a designated driver if you might be drinking.

City Sidewalks, Busy Sidewalks: Dealing With Holiday Stress

- Avoid procrastination. Stay organized: Make lists of things to do, and prioritize your time.
- Set realistic limits on how much you expect to achieve. You can only do so much at one time and in one holiday season.
- Remember to relax. Take time for yourself.
- If you’re traveling any distance, leave your house early to build in time for delays.

A Packful of Toys Means a Sackful of Joys: Keeping Children Safe

- Homes where small children live or are frequent guests need to take extra care when decorating. Avoid candles, sharp or breakable objects, and trimmings with small removable pieces. Don't put up displays that a small child might pull down.
- If hosting a gathering at which small children will be present, take down or move any decorations that may be safety hazards. Clean up promptly afterward to remove the potential hazards of leftover food, alcohol, or glassware.
- If visiting someone else's home with your young children, be aware that the home may not be "childproof."
- Be careful and thoughtful when selecting toys for gifts. Don't give young children toys that plug into an electrical outlet, and remove strings and ribbons from toys before wrapping them.

Related links:

- American Academy of Pediatrics: Holiday Safety Tips, 2005
- Consumer Product Safety Commission: Holiday Safety Tips
- National Safety Council: Holiday Season Safety
- Red Cross: Winter Holiday Safety

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