

Home safety



How to spot hazards
and prevent accidents



Public Health
Agency



On average two people die every week in Northern Ireland as a result of an accident in the home. More accidents happen in the home than anywhere else. There are countless home safety hazards – being aware of them is the first step to preventing accidents.

Children under five, older people and those who are vulnerable are most likely to have an accident at home, but home safety hazards are something we should all be aware of.

This leaflet includes some of the most common home accidents and offers tips on how to help prevent them.

Falls



Falls are the most common accident for all age groups. Young children and older people are especially at risk.

- Remove tripping hazards, such as loose or worn mats and trailing leads or wires. Keep your stairs free of clutter.
 - Ensure your home is well lit and always put lights on when getting up during the night.
 - Keep the floors dry to prevent any slipping.
 - If you use non-slip bath or shower mats, ensure they are cleaned regularly to avoid a build-up of soap scum.
 - Have broken or uneven pathways outdoors repaired.
- Keeping children safe from falls**
- Fit stair gates (recommended for use up to age 24 months), refrain from placing car and bouncy seats on worktops and always use the 5-point harness supplied with high chairs.
 - Ensure that windows are not accessible by small children. Arrange furniture so it cannot be climbed upon to reach windows. Window restrictors can be fitted to prevent windows from being opened wide enough for children to fall out.
 - Changing a baby's nappy on the floor will prevent falls from beds, sofas or changing tables.
 - Baby walkers are not recommended as they allow children to achieve movement faster than expected and can contribute to a fall if the walker topples over. Walkers also allow children access to things they might not otherwise be able to reach, such as poisons or hot drinks.

Poisonings



Most cases of poisoning happen at home, with children under five having the highest risk of accidental poisoning. Toddlers especially like putting things in their mouth to see what they taste like. They will also find all sorts of ways to reach things they think are sweets.

- Keep all medication out of reach and sight of young children by placing them in a high locked cupboard.
- Do not store chemicals in drink containers as these are attractive to children. Chemicals could also be mistakenly consumed by adults.
- Store all poisonous substances, such as household chemicals and cleaning materials, out of sight of children and in cupboards with child resistant locks.
- Take special care with washing machine and dishwasher liquitabs. Children, especially those under five, can easily mistake them for sweets. Store them out of reach in a high locked cupboard. Do not preload your appliance with a liquitab until you are ready to switch it on.

- Use plug-in air fresheners out of the reach of small children as the air freshening fluid, sachets or capsules are a potential poison. They could also be a fire hazard if left on for long periods or continuously.



- Take special care with button cell batteries, which children like to put in their nose, ears or mouth. Check toys and gadgets to make sure the button battery compartment is secured. Be careful with musical greeting cards, flameless candles and remote controls, as these items are not required to have secure battery compartments. Put products with unsecured button batteries out of children's reach.

Carbon monoxide



Known as the 'silent killer', as you cannot smell, see or taste it. Carbon monoxide fumes can come from any appliance that burns oil, solid fuel, wood or gas.

- A carbon monoxide alarm should be located according to manufacturer's guidelines.
- It is recommended you replace your carbon monoxide alarm in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions - this may be approximately every five to seven years.

- Batteries in detectors will have a limited lifespan. Mark a date of battery replacement.
- To protect from carbon monoxide poisoning, all boilers and fuel burning appliances must be serviced annually using a qualified engineer registered with the appropriate organisation.

For further advice, visit the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland's website:

www.hseni.gov.uk/watchout

E-cigarettes



Most e-cigarettes contain liquid nicotine. Children are attracted to colourful and sweet-smelling bottles of e-liquids. They are at risk of poisoning by swallowing, inhaling or absorbing e-cigarette liquid through their skin or eyes. Even small amounts can cause severe clinical effects such as seizures, coma or even death.

- Store e-cigarettes and refill containers where children cannot see or reach them. A high locked cupboard is best.
- Never refill an e-cigarette close to children, due to the risk of dangerous exposure.
- Vape away from children as they want to copy adults. Nicotine is highly addictive and can harm the developing brain. E-cigarettes may also contain other harmful substances.
- Do not leave e-cigarettes unattended on the charger due to the risk of fire.

Fires



There are lots of fire hazards in the home. Careless disposal of smoking materials is the biggest cause of accidental fire deaths in Northern Ireland. Smoke alarms should be tested once a week.

- Have a night-time routine
 - disconnect all electrical appliances that are not suitable to leave running 24/7 and close all internal doors. Closed doors help prevent the spread of fire and smoke.
- Treat lit candles as you would any other flame. Don't leave them unattended. Put them on a heat resistant surface and check they are not too close to anything that can catch fire. Put them out completely at night.
- Take care smoking, especially if you are drowsy, taking prescription drugs or if you have been drinking alcohol. Don't ever smoke in bed as your bedding could easily catch fire. Make sure cigarettes are extinguished using proper ashtrays. Keep matches and lighters out of reach of children.



- Old, damaged or faulty electric blankets are a fire hazard. Keep all electric blankets flat or roll loosely when storing away – never fold. Always fit an electric blanket as advised in the instructions. Look out for a third-party certification mark to ensure it meets the latest British or European safety standards. An example to look for is the BEAB Approved Mark. Only leave a blanket switched on all night if it has a setting for safe all-night use. Do not use hot water bottles along with an electric blanket as this could cause electrocution.

For more advice on fire safety and to check if you are eligible for a free Home Fire Safety Check, see www.nifrs.org



Burns and scalds



A child's skin is 15 times thinner than an adult's and will burn or scald much more easily. Your skin also becomes thinner with age.

- Do not drink hot beverages while holding a baby or child as a hot drink can scald up to 20 minutes after it has been made.
- Test bath water with your elbow before putting your toddler in. Always run cold water first and

remember taps will remain hot.

- Straighteners and curling wands can cause severe burns. When you switch off a hair appliance, put it immediately out of reach of children.
- Ensure children cannot grab hold of trailing cables such as a kettle or iron's cable.
- If you use a hot water bottle, make sure it has a protective covering.

Choking and suffocation



Babies and toddlers naturally grasp anything and put it in their mouth.

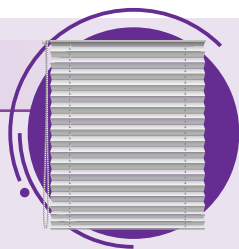
- Any item smaller than a 50p piece, such as buttons, beads, grapes or balloons, can cause a child to choke.
- Ensure all toys are age appropriate. The packaging should feature the age recommendation.
- Babies under one should not be given toys with long hair or fur.
- Ensure all toys are CE/UKCA marked. The CE/UKCA marking is the manufacturer's declaration that the product meets EU/GB standards for health, safety, and environmental protection.
- Take care when buying toys online as they may not conform to the relevant safety standards.
- Don't tie strings or ribbons to a pacifier or toy.
- Remember that jewellery can be dangerous around your baby including teething beads. They can break apart and release tiny gemstones, beads, or spacer beads, which are a choking hazard.
- Remove bibs before bed/nap time.
- Nappy sacks can cause choking and suffocation of babies under 12 months. Never store nappy sacks within your child's reach and do not give them to a child to play with.
- Babies should not sleep with anything in their cribs. Don't use pillows or duvets with babies under one, as they can suffocate if their face gets smothered.

Strangulation

The loop in blind cords can go around your child's neck, leading to strangulation. It takes as little as 18 seconds for a child to become strangled by a blind cord.

- Ensure cords and chains are pulled taut by fitting blind cord safety devices such as cleats.

- Do not place your child's cot, bed, highchair or playpen near a window or door blind.
- Do not place baby monitors within reach of your child's cot or bed as the leads can cause strangulation.



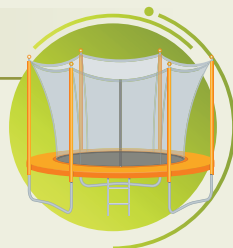
Garden safety

There are a number of potential hazards in the garden. Children are especially at risk.

- As little as five centimetres of water can drown a small child. Always make sure that garden ponds are securely covered and children are supervised while playing in a paddling pool. Be aware of items that can fill with rain water such as buckets, plant pots and sand pit lids.
- Secure all fences and close garden gates when children are playing outside.
- Keep lit barbecues or firepits in an open, outdoor space and never leave children unsupervised near open flames. Make sure they are fully extinguished when finished. Take care when disposing of

barbecues and coals and make sure they have cooled down before putting them in the bin.

- Keep chemicals and equipment, such as power tools and lawnmowers, locked away.
- Remove poisonous trees, plants and berries.
- Ensure all play equipment is placed on a soft surface, such as grass or a mat. If you have a trampoline, ensure that it has a safety net and that it is used by only one child at a time. Remember trampolines should not be used by children under six years of age.



Home safety support

For further information on safety at home, visit pha.site/safety-home

Local councils offer free home safety checks to families with children under five, people aged over 65 and those who are vulnerable. The check offers guidance on all aspects of home safety, as well as free safety equipment (subject to eligibility and availability).

Please contact your local council and ask for the Home Safety team. Find contact details for councils in Northern Ireland at www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/local-councils-in-northern-ireland



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