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To avoid a holiday curse: safety first



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While keeping active, minimizing stress, and just plain old having a ball with family and friends are the most important aspects of the holiday season, safety always come first.



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Last year during the two week holiday period, many children were treated for injuries in the Montreal Children's Hospital Emergency Room (MCH ER). More than half of these injuries occurred at home and were preventable, according to an MCH Holiday Safety Brochure. "One year we had a ton of toboggan injuries," said Carlo Galli, Injury Prevention Program Trauma Coordinator at MCH. "Kids not wearing helmets, running into fences or other kids, running into haystacks. If there are major snow storms we'll see more kids," said Galli who noted that the potential increase of injuries during the holiday

season really depends on the weather.

With kids getting all sorts of new outdoor gear, one of the easiest ways to avoid head trauma is to wear a helmet, said Dr. Benjamin Burko, assistant professor of medicine at McGill University health center and medical director at Tiny Tots Medical Center Co. in Dollard-des-Ormeaux.

Injuries such as head traumas, burns, and choking on small toys can be avoided with a little extra supervision and planning. For example, make sure anything lit—whether electrical or flame—is child-proofed.

Electrical wires should always be concealed with the proper safety boxes so kids can't get to the receptacles and candles should always be kept in low traffic areas, said Burko.

But burns don't only come from overturned candles or electrical wires bitten into by infants who'll put anything and everything into their mouths. They are also common when parents try to do too many things at once like cooking and caring for a child at the same time. "You're trying to taste the sauce and all the sudden he gets a splatter burn," said Galli, who also noted that another safety hazard—lead poisoning—has been particularly pertinent this year. For a listing of recalled toys, visit the Consumer Product Safety website (www.healthcanada.gc.ca).

While you should of course take recalled toys away from your children, there is no need to panic if you discover your child has been playing with a toy recalled because of lead paint, according to MCH toxicologist Dr. Dominic Chalut. "Lead poisoning occurs only after prolonged exposure to the substance," said Chalut. "There is no need to worry about lead poisoning in children who occasionally play with toys with lead paint. Their exposure to lead will be minimal."

Button batteries like those found in watches are becoming more widely used in children's toys and can do more damage than other swallowed pieces because they are easily swallowed and can remain stuck in the digestive track and even burn a hole in the

intestines, said Burko.

Given this, it is important to remember to choose toys appropriate to your child's age and stage of development and to stay away from toys that don't have age appropriate markings.

Because of the frequency of family visiting and close quarters, it's easy for bugs, viruses, and strep throat to get passed around "so the good old adages about washing hands and teaching kids to cough into sleeves rather than hands are good precautions," said Burko.

Most importantly, don't feel like you've got to attend that holiday party no matter what—there are some occasions where you might just be better off staying home. "One of you is going to have to sit it out if you've got a two-month old coming in close proximity to a sick family member," said Burko. "Especially because these things deteriorate and you can find yourself needing a doctor on Christmas Eve. Good luck."