



## Home Safety Tips For The Holidays

*How to avoid some of the most common accidents that occur throughout the season.*

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If it's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas everywhere you go, it's probably not because you've been counting down the days to December 25. More likely, it's the holiday music, lights and decorations popping up around town. The holidays are, after all, largely about atmosphere, and regardless of your feelings about when the holiday season should kick off, sooner or later, it'll be time to bring that atmosphere into your home.

Unfortunately, as families begin to roll out their favorite seasonal decorations and traditions, they also introduce a host of new hazards into their home. If that sounds overly worried, refer to the National Fire Protection Association, whose statistics show that 30 percent of all home fires and 38 percent of home-fire deaths occur during the months of December, January and February.

To help safeguard against holiday hazards, we spoke with Sophie Kaemmerle from

[NeighborWho](#) to learn how some of the most common holiday-related accidents occur and how to avoid them.

According to Kaemmerle, Christmas-tree fires, trips and slips, and falls are the three most common home accidents that occur during the holidays. Here's how she recommends avoiding them.

### Christmas-tree fires.

It may sound cliché, but Christmas tree fires are the most common home accident during the holidays. Christmas trees are responsible for more than 200 home fires each year. It's important to ensure that your tree is healthy, that the lights are working properly, to turn the lights off when away from home and overnight, and to keep the tree properly watered.

### Trips and slips

Unnecessary slips happen more often than you might think during the holidays. Between slipping on flooring and stairs in other people's home and tripping over gifts and toys, there are approximately 2,000 fall-related injuries every holiday season. Take time moving through family member's homes. Carefully watch where you're walking. Pick up gifts and wrapping paper straight away so no falls occur from leftover gift wrap.

### Falls

According to the CDC, more home falls happen during the holidays than any other time of year. Decorating for the holidays is a wonderful tradition, but it also can be one of the most dangerous. The most common decorating-related accident happens as a result of hanging lights. Do yourself a favor, test all lights before hanging them, always use a safe step ladder and have a friend or family member hold the ladder steady while you're decorating the roof or the tree.

### Taming flames

Lights and candles are among the most prevalent decoration for just about any holiday, but wherever you have a flame, you have the potential for disaster. Here's how to keep your candles under control.

Kaemmerle notes that Christmas Eve Day are the top two most common days of the year for home fires related to burning candles and fireplaces, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

"Take the proper precautions and keep stockings and other flammable items a safe distance from the flames of the fireplace or decorative candles. Keep candles in a safe holder so they

won't get knocked over," said Kaemmerle. "Always make sure the flame is out on candles when you leave the room. Always keep the Christmas tree far away from the fireplace and any candles. Before you leave or go to bed for the night, take extra care to extinguish the fireplace. Bury flaming logs and smoldering embers with ashes from the bottom of the fireplace using a fireplace shovel. This will extinguish active flames and cause embers to slowly die out. Then pour sand over the fire."

## Food safety

People tend to get ambitious with their holiday meals, and some amateur cooks may find themselves punching above their weight class. A dry turkey is far from the worst thing that can happen when an underprepared cook enters the kitchen. Kaemmerle says food-borne illnesses are common during the holidays. Here are her top four tips for avoiding them.

- Never thaw your turkey by leaving it out on the counter. A turkey, even while thawing, must maintain a certain temperature to stay safe. Defrost your turkey in the refrigerator, in a sink of cold water that is changed every 30 minutes or in the microwave.
- Raw poultry can contaminate anything it touches with harmful bacteria. Take the necessary precautions to maintain food safety when thawing, prepping and cooking your poultry. Clean all surfaces thoroughly with an antibacterial cleaner immediately.
- Cooking your stuffing in a separate casserole dish is much safer than cooking it inside the turkey. If you decide to put the stuffing in the turkey, do so just before cooking. Use a food thermometer to make sure the stuffing's center reaches 165°F. Bacteria can survive in stuffing that has not reached 165°F and may then cause food poisoning. Wait for 20 minutes after removing the bird from the oven before removing the stuffing from the turkey's cavity. This allows it to cook a little more.
- Set the oven temperature to at least 325°F. Place the completely thawed turkey with the breast side up in a roasting pan that is 2–2.5" deep. Cooking times will vary depending on the weight of the turkey. To make sure the turkey has reached a safe internal temperature of 165°F, check by inserting a food thermometer into the center of the stuffing and the thickest portions of the breast, thigh and wing joint.

## Tips for trees

Unless your house was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, you probably don't have a full-grown tree in your home most of the year. Bringing on in for Christmas can introduce a number of hazards, from fires to falls. Here are Kaemmerle's top tree safety tips.

- Always keep the Christmas tree (real or artificial) away from heat sources and open flames such as burning candles and fireplaces.

- When buying a real tree, choose a fresh tree so it's less likely to catch fire. Look for a tree with vibrant green needles that are hard to pluck and don't break easily from its branches. Avoid any tree that is shedding its needles excessively.
- When you're sure all your indoor and outdoor Christmas lights have been tested in a lab by the UL or ETL/ITSNA for safety, and throw out any damaged lights.
- Add water to the base of your tree daily to keep it hydrated and less likely to dry out.
- Always turn off the Christmas tree lights at night or when you leave the house. This goes for real or artificial trees.

### Protect your pets

Pets bring an added element of chaos in the home, but that chaos carries a particularly high potential for danger during the holidays. Kaemmerle recommends pet-owners take these extra precautions.

- Safely secure and anchor your Christmas tree so it doesn't tip and fall over on your pet causing injury. Christmas trees are new, sparkly and fun for most pets. Make sure the water at the base of your real tree is covered so your pet can't access the water which may contain fertilizers and bacteria which can cause nausea or diarrhea.
- Never leave burning candles unattended or within reach of your family pet. They may burn themselves or cause a fire if they knock candles over. Be sure to use appropriate candle holders placed on a stable surface away from pet's reach.
- The holidays typically offer a surplus of 'extras,' such wires, decorations and lighting. Keep wires, batteries and glass or plastic ornaments out of paws' reach. A wire can deliver a potentially lethal electrical shock and a punctured battery can cause burns to the mouth and esophagus. Broken ornaments can harm your pet's mouth and digestive tract causing a tremendous amount of damage.
- Keep holly, Christmas lilies and mistletoe out of your pet's reach. When ingested, these items can cause pets to suffer nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, even kidney failure.

### Tips for travelers

Some homeowners may decide to avoid the whole to-do altogether and get out of town for the holidays, but travelers have another concern to protect against, namely burglars, who Kaemmerle says take advantage of holiday travelers to break into unattended homes. Here are the protections she recommends.

- Have a trusted neighbor or house sitter check on your house daily. Ask them to collect

the mail, newspaper and packages, keep the sidewalks clear of snow, and make sure your house looks like somebody is home to deter a burglar.

- Keep your travel plans off social media; it's an invitation for trouble. Never post where you are going, when you are leaving or when you will be back. This is prime information for a thief because he will know when your house will be empty.
- Pretty wrapped gifts under the Christmas tree may look beautiful and picture-perfect, but it's also an open invitation for a burglar. Keep your Christmas tree and gifts away from windows or other places with a view. When you aren't home, it's easy to break through a window and snatch your gifts. This also goes for expensive items like electronics and wallets. Leaving items like this on your countertop is an invitation for a thief.