



Healthy Holiday Hints

By John P. Mamana, M.D.

As executives and their families embrace the brief lull from work to join the excitement of preparing for beloved holiday activities, it's important to remember the small precautions to protect your loved ones.

For example, many families decorate with lush greenery to set a festive tableau for the season. Although most holiday plants aren't deadly if ingested in small amounts, both toddlers and pets can choke on pine needles or become ill from nibbling on holiday favorites such as holly berries, Jerusalem cherry, or mistletoe. Playing with pine tree and poinsettia sap can cause itchy rashes.

And while a toppled tree can be a big mess and danger in its own right – it is the broken glass ornaments or even small sized dreidel that can cause choking or intestinal blockage in youngsters. In fact, a study from Children's Hospital Boston's Division of Emergency Medicine published in the December 2009 issue of *Pediatric Emergency Care*, reveals that seasonal decorations, particularly glass ornaments, cause of an average of five ornament-related injuries per year. "If you know that your child has a tendency to put things in his or her mouth, you should be especially careful" states co-author Lois Lee, MD, MPH, of Children's Division of Emergency Medicine, who also directs the hospital's Emergency Department Injury Prevention Program.

Other lovely holiday décor can be a surprise danger to kids, pets and parents. Executives should be aware that icicles or tinsel are a choking hazard for cats or small dogs while the finely spun glass known as angel hair can be irritating to your skin and eyes. If your bubble lights leak or break, the small amount of methylene chloride, also found in paint removers, can cause skin irritation. Along with acetone, that same methylene chloride is found in snow sprays. Short term reactions to inhalation of these fumes can result in nausea, lightheadedness and headaches.

Of course, the holiday season is made merry with flowing libations. Unfortunately, alcohol poisoning increases during the holiday season when teens and even younger children pretend to be grownups and gulp down leftover cocktails – or even pour their own. More alarming, today's teen is more interested in prescription drugs than street drugs – so grandparents and visitors should take care to monitor their prescription storage.



Finally, as you prepare a warm and welcoming home with scented candles, flickering lights and roaring fires, remember that carelessness can lead to tragedy. Never leave a fire unattended, put all fires and candles out before bedtime– and of course – avoid smoking. Children are known to eat whole cigarettes, cigars and the "butts", resulting in vomiting, sweating and seizures.

Water and secure your tree, check your lights, and test your smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. Move your plants to a safe location and remove small or broken objects daily. Have the number for poison control near your phone and as always, the doctors at Executive MD remind you that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

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