Holiday safety tips everyone should know.

It’s the most wonderful time of the year: warm moments with family, delicious dinners and desserts, and of course, presents. But it’s also a prime time for household fires and accidents. Follow these holiday safety tips to make sure all the season’s surprises are happy ones.

Fire hazards. The holiday season is stuffed with opportunities to start an open fire, and not the kind you can roast chestnuts over. Watch out for these fire hazards:

- **Fireplaces.** Get your chimney professionally cleaned before the season begins to clean out flammable creosote buildup and other debris. Regularly clean out ashes as well. When a fire is burning, keep children at least three feet away from the fireplace. And don’t throw gift wrap into the fireplace; it can start a flash fire.
- **Cooking.** Holiday guests tend to gather in the kitchen, so it’s extra important to keep pot handles turned inward toward the stove and keep flammable items like towels and pot holders away from burners. To safeguard your littlest partygoers, keep them occupied elsewhere with a game, craft or holiday movie. And make sure you have a functional kitchen fire extinguisher on hand, just in case.
- **Christmas trees.** If you get a real tree for Christmas, remember: The drier the tree, the more flammable it is, so put water in the base of your tree daily. And don’t keep it in the house for too long after the holidays.
- **Decorative lights.** Overtaxing your electrical circuits with too many lights can create a fire hazard, so never connect more than three strings of lights together. Replace older strings of lights with worn-out cords (try LED lights, which don’t get as hot). If you’re putting up lights on the exterior of

your house, make sure they are approved for outside use.
- **Candles.** If you decorate with candles, keep them high enough to be out of the reach of children, and don't use them in high-traffic areas where someone might bump into them. Be sure to extinguish them all before you go to bed. Better yet, use battery-operated candles – they don't melt and they keep your family safer.

Fire may be the number one hazard at the holidays, but it's not the only one. Here are a few more holiday safety tips to keep your family healthy and happy:

Avoid the fall season. Every year, thousands of homeowners injure themselves falling off ladders while putting up their holiday light displays. If you're using a ladder to string lights, make sure it's on a level surface, don't step on the top of the ladder, and don't try to climb up with your arms full. Have someone help you by steadying the ladder at the bottom.

Watch their mouths. Kids and pets love the holidays. Unfortunately, they also love to put things in their mouths that shouldn't be there. Keep these out of the reach of kids and pets:

- **Holiday plants.** While poinsettias have gotten a bad rap – they're not as poisonous as popularly believed – eating them can still cause stomach pain and sometimes vomiting. Holly, fir trees and mistletoe can be even worse, depending on the amount consumed. Learn the symptoms here, and consider using artificial versions of your favorite holiday plants.
- **Gift wrap, packaging and décor.** Small decorative gift wrap items can be choking hazards for a pet or small child. Attractive shiny décor like icicles and tinsel pose another choking risk. Some pets like to eat plastic packaging bags as well, and both kids and pets can suffocate if they put their heads inside them.
- **Alcoholic beverages.** A glass of wine or a mixed drink is a treat for Mom and Dad, but it could be poisonous to a child or pet, so never leave your drink unattended. Store liquor bottles in a locked cabinet.

Review your insurance coverage. With an increased risk of fire over the holidays, you'll want to review your homeowners coverage. And since the holiday season means more guests coming to your home, make sure you have adequate liability coverage, either on your homeowners policy or a personal umbrella policy. Slippery walkways could lead to injuries for guests, which could result in a lawsuit if they sue for pain and suffering.

The holidays are a busy time; sometimes we just need to slow down and pay attention to avert holiday mishaps. Keep our holiday safety tips in mind and you can keep the season merry, bright and safe. Happy holidays!