

Staying warm, cozy and safe by the fire

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(HealthDay)—Holiday gatherings might not seem complete without a warm crackling fire, but when a get-together includes kids, safety needs to be on everyone's mind.

First of all, a window should be cracked open to provide proper ventilation whenever a [fire](#) is burning, advises the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Then, the group suggests, take these additional steps to help avoid fire-related accidents and injuries:

- **Check the damper or flue before starting a fire.** This can be done by looking up the chimney with a flashlight or mirror. Make sure the flue is open. Then, keep it open until the fire is out completely so that all smoke goes outside. It's also important to check for animal nests or other blockages in the chimney that could cause smoke to fill the house. Chimneys should also be checked at least once a year by a professional.
- **Avoid burning wet or green wood.** Dry and well-aged [wood](#) burns evenly and creates less smoke and soot that can build up in the chimney. It's also a good idea to burn smaller pieces of wood on a grate. They will burn more quickly and generate less smoke than larger logs.
- **Don't allow ashes to build up.** Once a fire is out, the ashes left behind should be removed. Ashes restrict air supply to burning wood, which produces more smoke. There should never be more than an inch layer of ashes in a fireplace.
- **Clear the area around the fireplace.** Placing furniture, curtains, decorations, newspapers, books or other items near a fireplace could result in a house fire. Nothing flammable should be stored too close to a fireplace. Also keep a fire extinguisher handy.
- **Don't leave fires unattended.** There should always be an adult in the room when there's a fire in the fireplace. Never leave children alone in a room with a fire. Children should also be taught about fire safety. And, before leaving the house or going

to bed, make sure that the fire is completely out.

- **Use safety screens.** Hot glass doors in front of a fire can cause serious burns. Installing a [safety](#) screen in front of the fireplace can reduce the chance of an injury.
- **Store fireplace tools out of children's reach.** Kids can be tempted to play with the tools. Also store lighters and matches out of sight.
- **Equip your home with smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.** Check the devices monthly to make sure they're working. Replace their batteries at least once a year.

More information: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has more on [how to build a fire safely](#).

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