

# Mayo Clinic Q and A: Holiday safety

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DEAR MAYO CLINIC: I'm hosting my extended family over the holidays for the first time in many years. My great-nephew is 2 years old and will be the youngest person in attendance. I do not have any children, so I am not used to having a toddler around. What should I do

safety-wise to prepare for his arrival?

ANSWER: It's wonderful that you can host your family gathering this holiday season and welcome young and old into your home. The hustle and bustle of the holiday season can be a fun, exciting time for all.

While hosting in and of itself can be stressful, the inclusion of a toddler requires a bit more preparation, but it shouldn't add too many unnecessary items to your holiday gathering to-do list. Talk with his parents about what will be needed for sleeping arrangements and feeding. There are companies that rent equipment, such as highchairs, cribs and gates, if you don't have friends or neighbors to borrow from or if the parents are not able to travel with what he will need during his stay. Also, ask if there are any food allergies that could affect your menu.

Here are other few things to keep in mind as you prepare for guests, especially little ones, in your house this holiday season.

- **Manage your Christmas tree.** If you have a real tree in your home, ensure that the tree stand is always filled with water so the tree doesn't dry out and pose an increased fire hazard. If you put up an artificial tree, make sure it is made from fire-retardant material and the stand is flat on the ground. Some holiday ornaments are breakable or can pose a choking hazard for children. Put those special ornaments higher up on the tree so they are safe from little hands.
- **Keep flames away.** Lighted candles and fireplaces help give your home a cozy and inviting atmosphere. Protect the little one from potential burns by keeping candles, matches and lighters on higher shelves or counters. Use a fireplace screen to contain sparks and flying embers. It also helps to keep children and pets away from the flames.

- Watch for tempting seasonal decor. Sparkly and brightly colored decorations can be tempting to touch and explore. You should expect that your great-nephew will put things into his mouth as well. This helps with sensory motor development and is normal. Keep seasonal decorations out of his reach and secured to the wall. Any object small enough to fit through a toilet paper tube can obstruct an airway, so closely supervise him if the family is helping you decorate, especially when handling lighting, ornaments and breakable objects.
- Keep plants out of little hands. Just like seasonal decor, be wary of live plants. Keep mistletoe, holly berries and poinsettias out of reach of children. They are toxic when ingested.
- Remember electricity [safety](#). This tip is useful regardless of age. When powering up your seasonal decor, use power strips with built-in circuit breakers and avoid putting too many plugs into one electrical outlet. Keep cords out of the way or behind furniture, and insert electrical outlet covers into unused outlets. Purchase lights with the "UL Listed" mark, which certifies that the product has been tested to meet safety requirements.
- Find safe toys. If you are planning to purchase a toy for your great-nephew, make sure it is age-appropriate and that any batteries cannot easily be removed. Batteries shaped like disks, or button batteries, pose a choking risk to young children. Avoid placing gifts under the tree that contain glass, perfume or cologne, poisonous substances, or sharp materials.
- Monitor alcohol in the home. If you serve alcohol during the festivities, keep it locked and out of the reach of all [children](#) regardless of age. Quickly clean up leftover drinks.
- Lower the chance of a fall. Falls can happen anywhere, especially as your great-nephew is learning to walk and run. Stairs are a common cause of fall-related injuries in toddlers. To keep him safe during his visit, use an approved safety gate at the top and bottom of any stairs. If he likes to climb, move furniture away

from windows or the Christmas tree as well.

Carefully inspecting your home and taking care of any safety hazards can ensure you and your family have a happy and safe [holiday season](#) no matter the age of your guests. Enjoy your time together.

This response was contributed by Dr. Peter Reisner, Family Medicine, Mayo Clinic Health System, Chetek, Wisconsin.

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