

## Health

# Holiday safety tips

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The holiday season is usually a joyous time of year but it also brings the potential for poisonings and safety hazards, experts say.

Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and Health Canada offer these tips for safer celebrations:

- Alcohol can be a toxic ingredient. Ethyl alcohol is found in holiday beverages and in gifts such as cologne and perfumes. Poison control experts remind adults to never over-consume alcohol. They also remind adults to keep all alcoholic beverages, products and gifts that contain alcohol out of a child's reach.
- Toys can contain button or disc batteries. Disc batteries are small and coin-shaped and they are often found in handheld games, watches and other portable devices. If ingested they can become lodged in the esophagus and cause serious injury and death. Parents should seek medical attention if they suspect their child has ingested a button battery.
- Choose toys that are appropriate for the child's age.
- Throw out all packing materials like Styrofoam pellets, ties, plastic bags and wrapping as soon as possible. Children can choke or suffocate on them.
- Before using a cosmetic gift for the first time, do a patch test to check if you are sensitive or allergic to something in the cosmetic.
- Care must be taken to avoid skin contact when using dry ice. Dry ice is composed of carbon dioxide. Skin contact can cause tissue damage, and burns to the mouth can occur from ingestion. Flush the skin with lukewarm water if direct exposure occurs, and give lukewarm water to drink if a solid piece is swallowed.

## Poisoning prevention

- The berries of a few varieties of holly are reported to be poisonous. There are 400 different variations of holly. Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and a slowing down of breathing and heart rate can occur after ingestion of holly berries. The exact nature of toxic chemicals found in holly berries is unknown, but it should be noted that deaths have occurred in children who have consumed as few as 12 berries. The leaves of holly could potentially contain toxic chemicals. Parents should call a poison control centre if their child ingests holly.
- Jerusalem cherries allegedly contain Solanine. Solanine is found in several plants with known toxic potential but reports of toxicity in Jerusalem cherries are sparse. Reported signs and symptoms of Solanine toxicity include dilated pupils, salivation, nausea, vomiting, headache, bloating, diarrhea, respiratory depression, central nervous system depression, confusion, irregular heartbeat, coma and death. It is not yet known how many Jerusalem cherries would have to be ingested to cause poisoning so it is advised to call a poison control centre if a child ingests any part of a Jerusalem cherry.
- Poinsettias can cause irritation. Children who play with the Poinsettia plant leaves and then rub their eyes can experience redness and irritation. Though serious injuries do not occur due to ingestion of domestic varieties of Poinsettia plants, parents are advised to call a poison control centre if their child swallows pieces of the plant.
- Some essential oils and flavours can be toxic if ingested. Some ingredients that are in essential oils such as salicylates in oil of wintergreen, menthol, camphor, eucalyptol, and other oils and flavourings, can be extremely toxic if ingested. Other products may have high alcohol content or the potential to cause severe problems if ingested.

[Health Canada](#) has more tips on holiday trees, lights, fireplaces and wood stoves and general household safety.

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