



# Holiday Safety Tips

As we get ready to celebrate the holidays, it is essential to consider holiday safety during these busy times.

According to emergency physicians, some of the most common accidents this time of year include broken or fractured bones, falling off ladders or roofs and car accidents (especially parking lot accidents).



To ensure a happy and safe season, take a look at these holiday safety tips.

## Preparing Your Home

Here are some tips to help you safely prepare your home for the holidays

- **Keep your driveway and walkways clear:** When it snows, clear your driveway and walkways of snow and ice.
- **Holiday plants and pets do not mix:** Make sure you keep your pets away from poinsettias, holly, mistletoe and real Christmas trees as they can be toxic.
- **Reduce clutter:** Gifts, guests, decorations, and winter clothes can create hazards. Try to reduce the clutter before the holiday season or confine it to a specific area of your home.
- **Be diligent with home security:** The holiday season brings an increase in break-ins and theft. Always lock your doors, keep the garage closed, lock windows and make a note of strangers in your neighbourhood. Review your insurance policy to see what is covered.

## Electrical Safety

### Extension Cords and Plugs

- Don't overload cords or outlets by plugging in too many decorations – it can create overheating or blow the circuit. Never connect more than one extension cord.
- Never remove the third prong on plugs; this is the grounding pin and prevents shock in case of electrical equipment failure.
- Don't run extension cords under carpets, through doorways or in places where furniture may damage them.
- Keep outdoor connections above ground, away from water and plug into ground fault protected outlets.

### Christmas Light Safety

- Choose the right lights – only use indoor lights inside and use designated outdoor lights for outside decorating.
- Never exceed the recommended wattage.
- Replace damaged cords, plugs and ornaments.

## Fire Safety

- **Use your fireplace with care:** Whether you have a wood, natural or gas fireplace, this heat source presents potential danger. Keep kids and pets away, be careful when placing decorations and always ensure the fire is out before going to bed or leaving the house. Be sure to check if your fire insurance is up to date.
- **Use candles safely:** Candles should always be burning in sight. Place candles in low traffic areas, away from flammable items and out of reach from children and pets. More than 20% of Christmas Tree fires start because of a heat source like a candle or equipment being too close. When you leave the room, always blow out candles.
- **Check your safety alarms:** Check your smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detector, fire extinguisher and first aid kit.
- **Keep matches and lights out of reach from children**

## Christmas Tree Hazards

Real Christmas trees and Artificial Christmas Trees can both pose a fire hazards.

Real Christmas Tree - for real trees keep your tree well-watered and avoid keeping live trees longer than four weeks. Keep away from any sources of heat, especially candles.

Artificial Trees – artificial trees contain plastics like PVC and contain toxic additives like flame retardants. These toxins can pose a risk to pets and children if ingested. Artificial trees also have their own fire risks — especially if they are plugged in too long or aren't set up properly.

Both types of trees require safety procedures:

- When setting up any tree, make sure the base is sturdy to avoid tipping or falling over.
- Always unplug your tree at night.
- Check to make sure things stay plugged all the way in, as a half-plugged-in wire can be a big hazard, both for fires and electrocutions.
- Don't plug too many things into one outlet.
- Don't connect too many strings of lights in a row; electrically, it's about the same as plugging them into the same outlet.
- Check the wiring for tears in the plastic insulation, especially after it's been stored all scrunched up.
- Don't let children or pets chew, tear, or otherwise damage the wires.
- A hot bulb can ignite decorations and other flammable materials.
- If you have a metal tree, especially one with metal needles, check on how to safely light it. Metal conducts electricity and if any exposed wiring touches it, it can ignite decorations or other flammable materials.

## Holiday Decorating

On average, there are about 200 decorating-related injuries every day during the holiday season in Canada and about half of them involve falls.

When decorating consider:

- **Put safety first:** Ensure all decorations are properly secured to your home and are not at risk of falling. Also check for recalls.

- **Inspect all light strands before using:** Carefully inspect all light strands for damage, loose sockets, fraying, and broken lights.
- **Choose decorations wisely:** Avoid using decorations that look like food or toys if you have young children or pets.
- **Use a helper for decorating:** Always have someone spot you when using a ladder, lifting heavy boxes and hanging lights.
- **Place decorations carefully:** Keep sharp and potentially dangerous decorations and ornaments out of reach for kids and pets. Use shatterproof ornaments. Keep decorations away from heat sources.
- **Turn off lights when leaving:** Turn off your outside and indoor holiday lights before going to bed or leaving your home.

## Holiday Hosting

- **Avoid unattended cooking:** It can be challenging to balance preparing a meal, being a host, and entertaining. Make sure there is always someone able to help in the kitchen.
- **Safe food handling and preparation:** It can be easy to forget or overlook important food handling guidelines in the rush to prepare food. Do not skip food prep steps and raw meat practices.
- **Watch out for fire hazards:** There are plenty of fire hazards to watch out for. Make sure you have a screen on your fireplace, avoid placing candles in high-traffic areas and make sure people properly dispose of cigarettes.
- **Keep an extra eye on kids and pets:** With so much going on, it is essential to know who is supervising the kids and keeping an eye on pets. You never know what they could get into.
- **Arrive alive, drive sober:** Offer guests the option to stay over, have a designated driver to take people home at the end of the night and ensure no one is leaving impaired and getting behind the wheel.

## Online Shopping

Studies show around [43% of consumer fraud victims](#) said theft happened during online shopping.

- **Do not save credit card information on sites:** Although it is convenient, avoid saving your payment information to online accounts. Not all retailers are equipped to protect your information. Consider using a digital wallet to increase transaction security.
- **Ship to secure location:** When possible, arrange to have your packages delivered when you are home. Some delivery services offer pick-up options at post offices or shipping lockers for secure pick-up.
- **Avoid using public Wi-Fi:** Be mindful if you are doing any shopping from a public connection – these are used on public airwaves and are easily accessible for hackers to intercept data.
- **Use strong passwords:** Use a complex combination of lowercase, uppercase, letters, symbols, and numbers. Avoid using the same password for multiple accounts and do not use personal information such as your birthday.
- **Watch out for scam emails:** Clicking on emails from unknown or unrecognizable sellers can infect your computer with viruses. Delete them immediately, and do not open any attachments or click any links.
- **Check security policies:** Look for the small lock icon in the corner of your URL to confirm the page you are on as privacy protection is installed. The URL will also start with an "HTTPS" – if you do not see the "S" after, the webpage is not secure.

- **Keep an eye on accounts and bank statements:** Check your accounts often to ensure no mysterious or fraudulent charges. Let your bank know immediately if you see anything suspicious.

## Holiday Shopping

The holiday shopping season is hectic. With so many people in the stores and potential distractions, it is essential to be safe when shopping. Here is what you can do to stay safe while shopping:

- **Stay alert:** Be conscious of what is happening around you – beware of strangers approaching you or creating distractions.
- **Shop in familiar places:** Shop at stores and locations you frequent.
- **Do not leave valuables in plain sight:** Avoid leaving your wallet or gifts in plain sight in your vehicle - put them in the trunk or cover them up.
- **Park in well-lit areas:** Parking in well-lit and busy areas will deter thieves from approaching your vehicle.
- **Shop with friends:** This will make you less of a target for thieves. Try to shop during the day when possible.
- **Avoid drawing attention to yourself:** Leave expensive jewelry, electronics, and other items at home while shopping.
- **Do not leave your wallet unattended:** Keep your keys, wallet, cash and cards close by.
- **Give safe gifts to children:** Toys are age-rated for safety – be mindful of what age you are buying for. If you are gifting a scooter or other riding toys, including the appropriate safety gear.

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## Holiday Safety Resources:

[Pet Safety](#) - SPCA

[Holiday Fire Safety](#) – BC Government

[Holiday Safety Tips](#) – National Safety Council

[CCOHS Safety Tips](#)

[12 Days of Holiday Safety](#) – Government of Canada

[Shopping Safety](#) – RCMP

[Holiday Safety](#) – RCMP

[10 Tips for a Safe Holiday Season](#) – Vancouver Coastal Health