

Safety Awareness In The Home



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Home! - safe and sound! True or false? FALSE! Home can be an especially dangerous place to spend time. More people are unintentionally injured or killed while in their home than anyplace else, except their automobile.

Home is a very dangerous place for those younger than four years of age. Persons older than 65 are also at considerable risk of injury at home. Youngsters between five and 17 years old are the third highest risk group.

The trend for injury at home has generally been downward since 1982, but except for toddlers and those between 25 and 64 years of age, there has been a definite increase since 1990. Figure 1 shows the injury rates per 1,000 persons, from 1982 to 1991. (Accident Facts 1993 Edition, National Safety Council)

Numbers of accidental deaths in the home are in a general decline since a high of 29,000 in 1950, but have increased from 21,000 in 1992 to 22,500 in 1993. Falls have always been the main cause of accidental death in the home, followed in 1993 by poisoning from solids or liquids, burns from fire, suffocating on a swallowed object, firearms, suffocating by mechanical means, and poisoning by a gas.

Elderly persons (those over 75 years of age) are at high risk in many areas. A fall is their main cause of accidental death, followed by choking on an ingested object (such as poorly chewed food), death associated with fires in the home, poisoning by solids and liquids, drowning and poisoning by gases and vapors.

The age group next most at risk while at home is the group 25 to 44 years of age. The biggest threat to this group is accidental poisoning by solids and liquids, such as poisoning from drugs, mushrooms, medicines, and shellfish. Poisonings from spoiled food are not included; they are considered as a disease death.

Toddlers, persons younger than four years of age, are also at high risk in the home. Primary causes of their fatalities at home are death associated with fire, drowning, and suffocation by mechanical means (smothering by bedding, plastic film, etc).

Accidental injury in the home has a very high price tag. The National Safety Council estimates that accidental injuries suffered at home in 1993 cost \$86.5 billion. This includes lost wages, medical expenses, fire loss, employer costs, and insurance administrative costs. But, what price do we have for a human life? Safety is important!

Careless habits, simple ignorance, or just not thinking will lead to accidents, whether at home, visiting or on the job. The number of disabling injuries incurred at home nearly double those incurred at work. No one can afford to be careless anyplace, especially while at home.

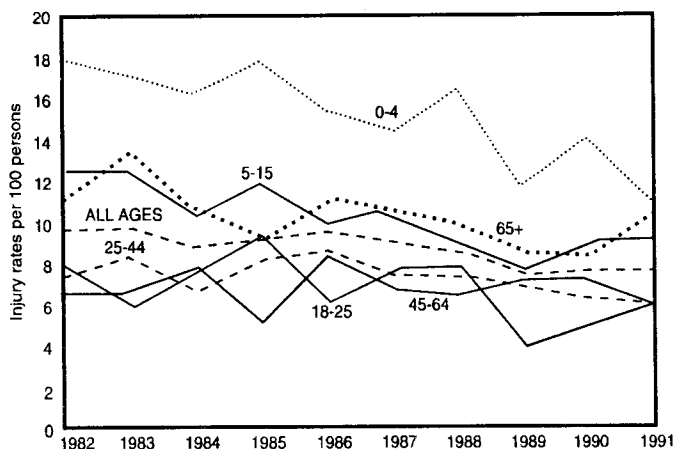


Figure 1. Injury Rates in Home Accidents by Age, 1982-1991. Source: National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey.



How safe is your home?

Respond to the following situations with a 'yes' or 'no', as the situation applies to you.

General Home Safety

Do you:

- Keep emergency phone numbers (police, fire station, poison control, doctor) near the phone?
- Keep poisonous plants away from children and pets?
- Keep toys and hobbies stored when not in use?
- Store guns unloaded and locked up?
- Wear eye protection when using power tools and household chemicals?
- Lock all doors and windows when leaving the house?
- Locate portable heaters away from combustible materials and surfaces?
- Have sufficient household wiring for appliances used?
- Use extension cords rated to carry the electrical current of the appliance?
- Use electrical outlet caps to protect toddlers?
- Keep a complete, up-to-date first aid kit in the house?



Fire Safety

Do you:

- Check the battery in your smoke detector every month?
- Have a "fire drill" procedure to follow in case of fire?
- Make sure every occupant knows of two exit plans for each room, especially upstairs bedrooms?
- Teach older children how to use windows for fire escape?
- Instruct children never, in case of fire, to hide under beds or in closets, or to lock themselves in rooms?
- Sleep with bedroom doors closed as protection against heat and smoke?
- Caution all occupants NEVER to go back into a burning building?
- Follow the rule, "Never smoke in bed or when drowsy?"
- Have and maintain smoke alarms?
- Exercise safety precautions when fireplace or wood-stove is in use?
- Have adequate ashtrays and exercise safe smoking habits?
- Keep matches away from small children and teach other children to use matches safely?
- Use only flame-retardant holiday decorations?



Bath Safety

Do you:

- Have non-slip surfaces on floors and in tubs and showers?
- Have well-anchored grab bars installed 40 inches above floors and in tubs and showers?
- Dispose of all medicines/prescription drugs as their time expires?
- Store all medicines/prescription drugs securely out of children's reach?
- Never mix cleaning agents (bleach and ammonia) for cleaning?
- Never use aerosol sprays near open/glowing flame or heat?
- Dispose of used/empty aerosol containers according to label instructions?
- Use ground fault protected electrical circuits?



Kitchen Safety

Do you:

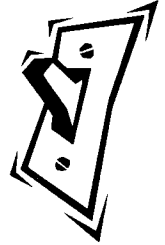
- Have, and know how to use, a fully charged fire extinguisher?
- Keep cleaning products and household chemicals safely out of children's reach or stored securely?
- Clean up spills immediately?
- Keep work areas well-lighted?
- Keep appliance cords from dangling over counter edges?
- Turn pot and pan handles away from the range front?
- Follow manufacturer's directions for use and care of appliances?
- Unplug small appliances when not in use?
- Use lower cabinets to store heavy appliances?
- Use appliances without overloading electrical circuits?
- Never wear loose clothing near heat or flame?
- Use effective pot holders at the stove or range?
- Use caution when using and cleaning knives, can openers, and other "sharps" in the kitchen?
- Teach others to use dangerous utensils correctly?
- Use a sturdy ladder or step stool to reach high cupboards?
- Remove doors/locks from unused refrigerators/freezers?
- Follow label instructions for use on both liquid and electric charcoal starters?
- Dispose of sharp, combustible or poisonous trash properly?
- Use ground fault protected electrical circuits?



Floors and Stairways

Do you:

- Have three-way switches at each end of stairways for safe, accessible lighting?
- Have light switches at each entrance to all rooms?
- Keep stairways and traffic paths clear of obstacles at all times?
- Have lights and sturdy handrails on all stairs and steps?
- Keep steps, walkways, ramps clear of snow/ice?
- Keep stairs, steps, and handrails in sturdy condition?
- Securely fasten stair treads and/or runners?
- Make certain that doors do not open over open stairways?
- Use gates on stairways to prevent toddlers from falls?
- Use only non-skid scatter rugs?
- Omit the use of scatter rugs for the elderly?



Basement and Attic Safety

Do you:

- Dispose of oily rags or store them in a tightly covered tin can in a cool place?
- Store paint, thinners, solvents, and flammable liquids in clearly marked, tightly closed containers?
- Frequently remove papers, rags, and rubbish from storage areas?
- Have the furnace, heating stoves, chimneys and flues inspected and cleaned at least once a year?
- Limit the use of extension cords and number of appliances plugged into outlets to prevent electrical overloading?
- Keep the basement floor dry to avoid shocks from light fixtures or electrical equipment?
- Teach older children to safely use carpentry, plumbing and electrical equipment?
- Store dangerous equipment out of reach of young children?

Furnishings Safety

Do you:

- _____ Select stable swivel chairs with four or more legs to avoid tipping?
- _____ Provide chairs that fit the persons using them?
- _____ Select furniture items that fit the room size for ease of movement in the room?
- _____ Select furnishing fabrics that are flame-resistant, non-allergenic, and allow for ventilation?
- _____ Follow suggested guidelines for crib, playpen and bunk bed safety?
- _____ Check that doors and drawers operate smoothly and easily?
- _____ Repair or discard wobbly chairs, stools, benches, lawn furniture and ladders?



Outdoor Safety

Do you:

- _____ Remove the keys from vehicles so children cannot start them?
- _____ Drain or cover children's swimming pool when not in use?
- _____ Practice lawnmower/snow-blower safety precautions?
- _____ Avoid storing paints, lawn/garden chemicals, auto supplies within reach of children or pets?
- _____ Maintain pet restraints (ropes, kennels, pens) in good condition?
- _____ Keep the yard free of debris, tools, and toys?
- _____ Keep garden hoses stored when not in use?
- _____ Cover all trash containers securely?



What is your score in home safety? Every "yes" is a point for safety awareness; every "no" is a point toward accidents in YOUR home. Use this guide to start a home safety campaign NOW!

Indoor Air Quality

Do you:

- _____ Use exhaust fans in kitchens, bathrooms, laundry areas and home workshops?
- _____ Change air filters regularly on the furnace if it is a forced air type?
- _____ Use and maintain a humidifier during the dry winter months to maintain relative humidity at about 40%?
- _____ Use and maintain a dehumidifier during the damp summer months, if needed to minimize mold and mildew problems?
- _____ Check your home for radon levels with a test kit?
- _____ Use a carbon monoxide detector in the furnace area?
- _____ Encourage smokers to smoke outdoors?
- _____ Use label guidelines and adequate ventilation with aerosol spray paints, volatile cleaners and chemicals?

Safety awareness is:

1. taking time to eliminate hazards as you find them.
2. taking time to reduce risk.
3. taking time to teach safe practices to others.



NOW is the time to check and improve safety awareness.

Dial For Safety

1-800-732-2200, the N.D. Poison Control Center (information on poisonous substances, anti-dotes, poison-emergency information).

1-800-638-CSPC, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (to inquire about product recalls, warnings; to report product injuries, defective or hazardous products).

Extension Resources (available through your local county extension office)

- Fire Extinguisher for the Farm and Home," AE-825 (circular)
- Woodburning Safety," (slides, cassette)
- RADON in North Dakota," AE-969
- Radon - Reducing The Risks," Video 398
- Lightning Protection," Electric Power Quarterly No. 92
- Indoor Air Quality," Electric Power Quarterly No. 125
- Use Electricity Safely," Electric Power Quarterly No. 113
- Basic Electrical Safety," Electric Power Quarterly No. 132

Other Resources

- Local Hospital
- Local Fire/Rescue Department
- Local Police/Sheriff
- County Health Office
- Safety Equipment Stores



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