Holiday safety tips to keep the season merry.



Our calendars are usually packed with activities during the holiday season. From decorating your home to visiting family, there are countless opportunities to have fun. And if you follow these safety tips along the way, you can keep your holidays 100% merry — 0% scary.

Travel safety tips.

If you're taking a road trip over the river and through the woods to Grandma's house, here's how to do it as safely as possible.

- **Have your vehicle inspected and serviced before leaving.** Holiday traffic presents enough challenges — don't add a dying battery or oil leak to the list. Get it handled before you go.
- **Check the weather forecast.** Keep an eye on the forecast for several days before your trip. If bad weather is predicted, leave a day earlier or later to avoid it.
- **Expect delays.** Traffic will be heavy, especially if you're driving in the days just before or after the holiday. Research alternate routes before you go to avoid the busiest roads.
- **Share your travel plans.** Whoever you're visiting, let them know when you plan to leave, the route you're taking, and when you expect to arrive. If something goes wrong and you can't contact help, they can send someone to find you.
- **Keep a winter emergency kit in your car.** Include jumper cables, reflective triangles or flares, a snow shovel, cat litter (for traction), blankets, a jack and lug wrench, and a first-aid kit. For a more

complete list, see our blog, Things you should keep in your car at all times.

- **Take a map.** Don't rely entirely on GPS apps to guide you; if you lose service, you'll be lost. Mark your route on a printed map and bring it with you.
- **Drive with extra caution.** Sadly, the holidays are a peak time for traffic fatalities, and a third of these are alcohol related. Watch for vehicles moving erratically and keep your distance. Get a cab or rideshare if you're impaired in any way.

Decorating safety tips.

In your quest for neighborhood decorating dominance, keep safety in mind.

- **Be bright about lights:**
  - Make sure that the lights you use outdoors are designated for outdoor use.
  - Replace light sets that have damaged sockets, frayed wires, or loose connections.
  - Follow package directions for the number of light sets that can be connected.
  - Replace older strings of lights with LED lights, which don't get as hot.
  - Turn off all lights and decorations when you go to bed or leave the house.
  - Use battery-operated candles in your home to reduce fire risk.
- **Keep your tree danger-free:**
  - An artificial tree is a safer pick, especially for homes with pets and/or small children.
  - If you choose a real tree, water it regularly; a dry tree is a more flammable tree.
  - Use artificial garland over the fireplace to reduce fire risk.

Cooking safety tips.

Follow these tips to cook up a safe holiday feast.

- Keep pot handles turned toward the center of the stove, so guests won't knock hot food or liquid off the burners.
- Keep flammable items like towels and potholders away from burners, and avoid wearing long, flowy sleeves or scarves while cooking.
- Keep a kitchen fire extinguisher on hand. To be sure it's still working, check the pressure gauge to see if it's still in the green "good for use" area.
- Test smoke detectors before the holidays to make sure they're functioning properly.

See more tips for preventing home fires.

Toy safety tips.

Use these guidelines to choose toys carefully for little ones.

- Choose toys in the correct age range for the child.
- For children under 3, avoid toys with small parts that could be choking hazards.
- For kids younger than 10, avoid toys that plug into an electrical outlet.
- Don't give toys with button batteries or magnets; these can be harmful or fatal if swallowed.
- If you're giving a riding toy like a scooter or skateboard, give safety gear with it (such as a helmet and knee/elbow pads).

With a little thought and preparation, you can give your family the gift of a safe, relaxed holiday season. To add a little more peace of mind, double-check your homeowners and auto insurance policies to be sure you have plenty of coverage.

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