



Harris County Hospital District

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NEWS RELEASE

Spring Cleaning – a Good Time to Childproof Your Home

HOUSTON (March 2, 2007) – The sun is out, the birds are chirping, and you’re gearing up to clean your house from top to bottom, inside *and* out. While cobwebs and dust bunnies may be tops on your list, this is also a good time to look for hidden child hazards.

“Spring cleaning provides the perfect opportunity to childproof your home and eliminate potential dangers,” said Dr. Shea Palamountain, director of El Jardin pediatric clinic at Ben Taub General Hospital. “This is a good idea even if you don’t have children of your own – perhaps you have nieces or nephews who visit often, or maybe you have friends who come around with their kids. It’s important that we make our homes safe for the little ones in our lives.”

Safety latches and outlet covers - Take a look at electric sockets throughout the house. Cover exposed sockets and check existing covers for a snug and proper fit. Install safety latches on cabinet doors and check existing latches to make sure they work properly. Replace broken/worn ones if needed.

Allergens - Dust mites and mold are two common allergy triggers for both children and adults. Start by washing bedding, pillows and stuffed animals in water that’s at least 130 degrees, and disinfect showers, tubs and sinks.

Toxins - Cleansers, insecticides and other chemicals are poisonous if consumed. Make sure these and other toxic products are out of children’s reach. If you are fumigating or fogging your home for pest control, air out your house several hours before allowing your child to return. Certain chemicals and aerosols can cause breathing problems for children, especially those with asthma. Also, remember that some house plants are poisonous when eaten. Make an inventory of your greenery and replace those that pose a risk.

Furniture - Arrange furniture so that sharp corners point away from high traffic areas, especially those where children often play. Also, make sure televisions and other large appliances are on a steady surface and shelves are secured to walls to avoid toppling.

Medicine cabinets - Make sure prescriptions and other medications are out of children’s reach. If possible, place safety locks on cabinet doors. Check bottles and packages for expiration dates and throw out expired products. This is also a good time to build or restock your emergency kit.

Firearms - If you keep a firearm in your home, make sure it is unloaded and locked away in a secure area out of the reach of children. Store the firearm separately from ammunition, and make sure keys to unlock the storage areas are not accessible to children. If possible, install firearm safety locks.

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Fire safety - Test fire extinguishers and smoke alarms to make sure they work properly and replace them as needed. Smoke alarms should be located on every level of your home and in sleeping areas. Alarm batteries should be replaced yearly, while alarms should be replaced every 10 years. In your child's room, check night lights for contact with flammable objects, like drapes, as this can spark a fire. This is also a good time to plan or revisit your emergency evacuation route. Look for obstacles in hallways and by doorways which may cause a problem during a hasty retreat. Make sure matches and cigarette lighters are kept out of the reach of children.

Carbon monoxide - Gas appliances can produce combustion fumes that contain carbon monoxide if not maintained regularly. The odorless gas can be fatal, causing symptoms ranging from headaches, dizziness and nausea to chest pain and confusion. Have your gas appliances serviced by a certified technician every year and install battery-operated carbon monoxide detectors throughout your home, particularly in sleeping areas. Check or replace the batteries every six months.

Lead poisoning - Approximately 80 percent of homes built before 1978 have some lead-based paint in them, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Keep your child's play area clean and dust-free. Examine walls for cracked or chipped paint, and repaint if needed. Do not sand areas that may contain lead-based paint. If possible, hire a certified lead inspector to inspect your home.

Fall prevention - If you have young children, install safety gates at stairways and hallways. Make sure rugs have non-skid backings and remove those that may cause tripping. Also, use rubber mats or skid-resistant stickers in tubs and showers. Check windows to make sure they lock properly, particularly on upper levels of your home, and remove nearby items children can climb to reach the window. With infants and toddlers, lower crib mattresses once the child learns to sit so they cannot climb or fall over the crib railing.

Choking, suffocation and strangulation - Assess your living areas for small items children can choke on or stick in their ears, nose or mouth, like decorative rocks or beading on table runners or tassels, and move these out of reach. To avoid suffocation, remove plastic wrapping from mattresses and keep plastic bags out of reach. Tie up cords on drapes, window blinds and roman shades so they are out of reach. Make sure cribs are located away from hanging cords and position hanging mobiles high so children can't reach them. Keep ties securing bumper pads to cribs out of reach.

Water safety - Check spa and hot tub covers for proper fit and security. These should also be secured by a locked fence or gate at all times. Make sure fences, gates and locks around pools operate properly. Make sure to empty and store small inflatable/wading pools when not in use and check life preservers for signs of wear and tear, which may impair their effectiveness.

“Now is also a good time to update emergency contact information, which should be located near your telephone,” said Palamountain. “This includes the number to poison control, your child's pediatrician, the nearest hospital, and your local police and fire stations.”

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation's third most-populous county. It provides more than 1.1 million health care visits each year to uninsured and underinsured residents of Harris County. The hospital district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, and an extensive network of community-based clinics, health centers, and mobile health units.