

YOUR Health

Public Health Programs & Services - Department of Health Services - County of Los Angeles

Vol. I; No. 3; Spring, 1999

Is Home Sweet Home Also Home *Safe* Home?

Most of us spend more time at home than any other single place. Whether it is an apartment or a house, your home is your castle. It should be a healthy place too. This issue of Your Health gives many tips on topics from poisoning prevention to indoor air quality to make home sweet home a home safe home!

Health Insurance For Your Children

Do your children get the health care they need? Over 300,000 children in Los Angeles County are not enrolled but are eligible for no cost or low cost health insurance from the Medi-Cal and Healthy Families programs. To find out if you qualify, call the California Healthy Families and Medi-Cal Information Line at (800) 880-5305.

7th Grade Hepatitis B Immunizations

A new California law requires students to have Hepatitis B vaccinations to attend 7th grade this fall. Hepatitis B is a virus that can cause liver cancer and death. To be fully immunized requires a series of three shots over a period of six months. So, get your sixth graders started today. For more information, call your doctor, school, or the County Immunization Program at (213) 580-9800.

News
to
Note:



*Unintentional injuries
are the leading cause of
death for children over
one year old.*

You CAN Prevent Accidents

We call them accidents. Health professionals call them unintentional injuries. Everyone agrees that, most of the time, they can be prevented. Aside from car crashes, the most common unintentional injuries occur at home from fires, falls, drowning, and poisoning.

Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death for children over one year old. Every year in Los Angeles County, over 20 bus-loads of children and youth aged 0-24 years die from unintentional

injuries. In 1995, over 10,000 were hospitalized for unintentional injuries.

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Most Poisonings Occur at Home

Most poisonings occur in the home and involve children. In 1996, 91 percent of all poisonings in the United States happened at home. Over half involved children less than six years old. Cleaning products, medicines, cosmetics, and personal care products were the poisons most often taken. Even a small amount of some of these substances can be deadly.

- Keep medicines and other potential poisons out of the reach of children.
- Put child-proof latches on all cabinets used for these products.
- Remember vitamins and herbal preparations are medicines too, and potentially toxic (especially iron).
- Make sure bottles are labeled and caps are on tight. Do not leave safety caps off.
- Make sure visiting care givers, like grandparents and other relatives, keep their medicine out of reach.
- Also keep purses up and away from children; they often have medicines and other poisons inside.
- Be especially careful around young children who are old enough to get into things but too young to understand the dangers.
- Don't mix cleaning supplies. Some, like bleach and ammonia, can make poisonous gases.
- Never use food or drink containers to hold non-food items. Throw out poisons when they are no longer needed.
- Keep the poison control number by your phone.
- Keep a bottle of syrup of ipecac in your home, but use it only when told to do so by the poison control center.

Whatever the cause, if you think someone has been poisoned, don't wait for the person to look or feel sick; call the California Poison Control Center right away at (800) 8-POISON (876-4766).

If the person is unconscious, convulsing (having seizures), or not breathing, call 911 right away.

Preventing Accidents *(cont. from p. 1)*

CHILD PROOF

Get down on the floor and look at your home from your child's view. Ask yourself, "What dangers look too inviting?"

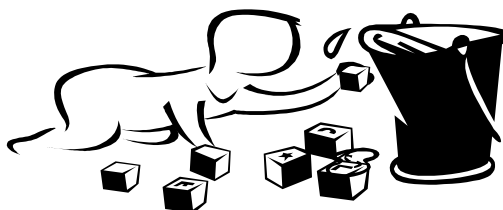
- Protect electrical outlets with approved child outlet covers and latch cabinet doors, especially those with medicines and cleaning supplies.
- Always keep small children where you can see them. If you have to leave, even for a minute, bring them with you.
- Don't let children play with balloons or with toys that have small parts they could swallow.
- Lock up guns, keep them unloaded, and store bullets in a separate place.



PREVENT FALLS

For adults, especially seniors, take care to reduce falls. One out of every three people over 65 in the United States falls each year. In the United States, falls account for 87 percent of all bone fractures in senior citizens.

- Keep water, toys, and other objects off of floors and stairs.
- Secure carpets and rugs with tacks, tape, or non-skid materials.
- Bathtubs and shower floors should have a non-slip surface.



PREVENT FIRES

The two most common causes of fires at home are cooking or heating equipment and tobacco smoking.

- Never leave food cooking on a stove or in an oven unattended.
- Keep things that can catch fire away from stoves and heaters.
- Never smoke in bed or when you are sleepy.
- Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach or in child-proof cabinets.
- Install smoke detectors on each floor and outside every bedroom. Check batteries monthly.
- Keep fire extinguishers in your home and read the directions now. Don't wait until there's a fire.

WATER SAFETY - INDOORS

Water that is too hot can scald young hands. Drowning is also a common danger inside the home. A child can drown in just a few inches of water so bathtubs, toilets, and buckets of water are all potential hazards.

- Check your water heater temperature. Set the water heater temperature to 120 degrees or lower.
- Keep toilet seats down.
- Keep bathroom and kitchen doors closed.
- Empty buckets of all liquids when you're done with them.
- Drain sinks and bathtubs when you're done with them.
- Keep clothes washer and dryer doors closed.

For more information about home safety, call the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Affairs at (800) 483-7342 or call the Los Angeles County Violence and Injury Prevention Program at (213) 240-7785.

How is the Air - Indoors?

Los Angeles is well known for its smog. Less well known are the dangers that may be in the air inside our own homes from tobacco smoke to dust mites. Fortunately, air quality indoors is under our control.

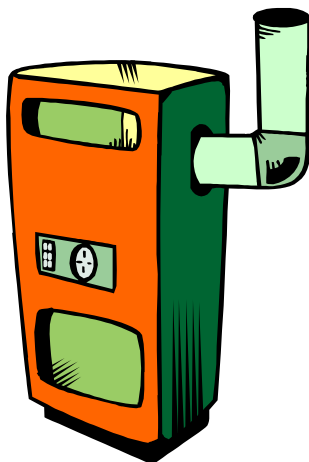
Tobacco Smoke

Cigarette smoke has over 4,000 chemicals, including 43 known to cause cancer. With 1.2 million smokers in Los Angeles County, there is a lot of smoke clouding our homes and our lungs. So, for National Cancer Control Month this April, don't smoke. If you must smoke, do it outdoors, especially if there are children in your home. Room air-filtering devices help but they mainly remove solid particles, not the dangerous gases that affect health.

Cigarette, pipe, and cigar smoke increases the risk for lung cancer, many other types of cancers, heart disease, ulcers, bronchitis, emphysema, and many other problems. If you don't smoke but live with someone who does, you have a 30 percent higher risk of lung cancer than someone who lives in a smoke-free home.

Children are easily affected by tobacco smoke due to their smaller less developed lungs. Eleven percent (308,000) of L.A. County children are exposed to second hand smoke in the home all or most of the time. Second hand smoke increases children's chances of bronchitis and asthma. Children exposed to smoke at home get sick more often, miss more school, and get more ear infections than children living in smokeless homes.

For more information on preventing exposure to second hand smoke, call the County Tobacco Control Program at (323) 351-7786. To quit smoking, call (800) 7NO-BUTT.



Radon

Radon is the second most common cause of lung cancer. For tobacco smokers, radon significantly increases their risk for lung cancer.

Radon is a gas that comes from uranium naturally found in rocks and soil. The gas can't be seen, smelled, or tasted, but it can build up inside houses and apartments. Nationwide, 6 percent of homes have significant levels of radon. Radon build-up occurs more often in buildings with basements or made with bricks, rocks, or other soil-based materials. It can also enter homes through well water.

Radon gas breaks down into radioactive elements that can hurt your lung cells if they are breathed in. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Surgeon General recommend all houses and first and second story apartments get tested for radon. Most hardware stores sell charcoal radon monitors to measure the level of radon in your home. If your home scores four or above on the radon test scale, call the EPA Radon Hotline at (800)-SOS-RADON.

Carbon Monoxide

Does your home have a gas heater, clothes dryer, or fireplace? If so, make sure to have these systems inspected every year. If the gas is not burning or venting properly, carbon monoxide gas from the flames can build up to lethal levels in your home. Carbon monoxide is colorless, odorless, and tasteless so you might not notice it until it's too late.

Never use a gas stove to heat your home. Never use a gas barbecue indoors. Never leave a car running in an attached garage. Contact your local gas company to have a heater inspected. For answers to general questions regarding carbon monoxide, call the L.A. County Public Health Housing and Institutions Program at (323) 881-4038.

Mold

Leaky roofs or excess moisture from a humidifier or a bathroom can spawn mold. Mold can cause allergies and breathing problems for people with asthma.

Mold needs water to grow. Musty odors and heavy condensation on windows or walls can be signs of the dampness that can cause mold. Molds can grow in plain view on walls, ceilings, and floors or out of sight on refrigerator drain pans, pipes, or even old flower pots.

To get rid of mold, first identify and fix the cause of the moisture and remove damaged materials (plaster, carpet, carpet pad).

(continued on p. 4)

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

A child's energy can wear out even the most loving parent. If you're having a rough day yourself, being patient can be a challenge. Whether you are weathering a whirlwind of activity inside on a rainy day, or the release of pent-up childhood enthusiasm when the sun shines, here are:

12 Alternatives to Lashing Out at Your Kids

1. Take a deep breath. And another. Then remember that you are the adult.
2. Close your eyes and imagine you are hearing what your child is about to hear.
3. Press your lips together and count to 10. Or 20.
4. Put your child in a time-out chair (one minute for each year of age).
5. Put yourself in a time-out chair. Think about why you are angry; is it your child or is your child simply a convenient target for your anger?
6. Phone a friend.
7. If someone can watch the children, go outside and take a walk.
8. Take a hot bath or splash cold water on your face.
9. Hug a pillow.
10. Turn on some music. Maybe even sing along.
11. Pick up a pencil and write down as many helpful words as you can think of. Save the list.
12. Clearly explain the rules to your child before they ask.



For more information on child abuse, call the County Child Abuse Prevention Program at (213) 240-8146

Indoor Air Pollution *(cont. from p. 3)*

Next, open windows and doors and use fans to dry the area. Clean the area with a non-ammonia cleaner and hot water. Dampen the area before scrubbing so mold spores don't go into the air.

Next, disinfect the area with a mixture of $\frac{1}{4}$ cup bleach per gallon of water. Let the area dry completely before installing new building materials (six weeks or more).

Your Health is published quarterly by the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, Public Health Programs and Services. Please make copies of this newsletter to share with others.



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Dust Mites

Dust mites are microscopic insects that can live in the dust in our homes. They eat the skin cells humans slough off every day. The tiny feces from the mites can cause allergic reactions in some people.

To reduce and prevent dust mites in your home, clean and dust regularly. Also change and clean sheets, blankets, and towels often. People who are very allergic to mites may need to put a plastic cover over their mattresses to keep the mites out of their beds.

For more information on molds or mites, call the County Environmental Hygiene Program at (213) 738-4078.

Lead Poisoning is the Number One Environmental Health Hazard for Children.

Lead can hurt a child's growing brain, changing behavior and reducing intelligence. The most common source for lead poisoning is from lead-based paint. Some paints contained lead until 1978. Homes built before 1950 are the most likely to have lead paints.

Lead paint, especially on water damaged walls, can give off lead dust that is too small to see. The lead dust then settles in your home with other dust. That is one reason why you should wash off toys, bottles, or pacifiers that fall on the floor. Children putting paint flakes into their mouths can also lead to lead poisoning.

A blood test is the only way to know if a child has become lead poisoned. In many cases, Medi-Cal or CHDP will pay for the test. For more information about lead poisoning and lead tests call the County Lead Prevention Program at (800) LA-4-LEAD.