

10 Hidden Hazards that can Hurt or Kill your Child or Pet

By Debra Holtzman

"Don't take chances when it comes to your child or pet's safety (such as a dog, cat or ferret)," warns Debra Holtzman J.D, M.A, an internationally acclaimed safety and health expert and best-selling author of "The Safe Baby: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Home Safety" (Sentient Publications).

"You can prevent injuries associated with these ten items by becoming educated about their potential danger and by taking the necessary precautions," says Holtzman.

1. **Latex Balloons:** More children have suffocated on uninflated balloons and pieces of balloons than any other type of toy. Balloon-related deaths are more common among children ages three and older than among younger children. Keep latex balloons away from children under 8 years old and pets. Consider mylar balloons instead.

2. **Stuffed Toys:** Be aware that seams can separate and allow stuffing or plastic pellets to be released, presenting a choking hazard. Check also for small detachable parts, security of eyes, nose and mouth of stuffed toys.

3. **Garage Doors:** Watch out for automatic garage doors. If your garage door does not already have one, install a sensor such as an "electric eye" for the garage door. It signals the door to reverse its motion if anything is in the way.

4. **Disc Batteries:** They may, if swallowed, stick in the throat or stomach, causing serious burns as the chemical leaks out.

5. **Window Treatments With Hanging Cords:** Those manufactured before 2001 can pose a potential strangulation hazard. Replace them with today's safer, cordless products, especially in children's bedrooms and play areas. Parents wishing to retrofit rather than replace can order free retrofit kits from the Window Covering Safety Council's Web site, www.windowcoverings.org, or by calling (800) 506-4636.

6. **Antifreeze:** Children or pets could drink large amounts of this sweet-tasting liquid if it is left out in an open container or if spilled on your driveway. The main ingredient in many major antifreeze brands is ethylene glycol, which is extremely toxic. (Be aware, dogs are known to chew through containers to get at antifreeze.) Use antifreeze with propylene glycol, which is considerably less toxic, or use antifreeze that has a bittering agent added to make it taste unpleasant.

Windshield washer fluid is also extremely toxic. It can cause blindness soon after ingestion.

7. **Large and Heavy Furniture and Appliances:** Eight thousand to 10,000 victims are treated in emergency rooms annually for furniture tip-over injuries, and some of these injuries are fatal. Use angle braces or anchors to secure to wall.

8. **Dieffenbachia and Philodendron:** These two common household plants are frequently ingested and can cause very serious symptoms. These plants contain oxalates, small crystals that get released into the mouth when the plant is chewed,

causing extreme pain and inflammation.

A popular flower garden plant is the beautiful oleander. Everything about this plant is toxic, including the water in which cut flowers are placed and any smoke that results from burning the plant. In fact, a single leaf or berry can kill.

9. Storage Chests: Suffocation deaths occur in such places when a child or pet crawl inside and cannot escape. The best choice is one without a lid or one with a lightweight, removable one. If a chest closes, make sure it has ventilation holes.

10. Metal Jewelry: Not only do they pose a choking hazard, lead has been found in inexpensive children's jewelry. In addition, some costume jewelry designed for adults has also been found to contain lead.

Lastly, pet owners beware! Sugarless chewing gum and products containing xylitol are poisonous to pets. Also, other food items that can be toxic to pets include chocolate, onions, garlic, grapes, raisins, avocado and macadamia nuts.

Debra Holtzman has a master's degree in Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA) and is an attorney. She been featured on NBC's Today Show, MSNBC and Discovery Health Channel and was chosen a Reader's Digest Everyday Hero. "The Safe Baby: A Do-it-Yourself Guide to Home Safety" (Sentient Publications) offers parents economical, easy-to-implement solutions to provide a safe, healthy, and green living lifestyle for children, dogs and cats.