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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Tips to make your gas fireplace safe for your toddler

Perhaps nothing is more comforting on a winter night than snuggling up in front of a fireplace. But that comfort can turn to terror in an instant if a child is burned by the hot glass panel that sits in front of gas fireplaces.

In the past, gas fireplaces were mainly ornamental additions to homes and hotels. Now, they often are installed as heating units and can get blisteringly hot. Glass fronts to fireplaces — often placed at the perfect height for curious toddlers to touch or fall into — can reach 500 degrees and cause injuries in as little as one second.

One study reports that more than 2,000 children ages 5 years and younger have been injured by the glass door to a gas fireplace since 1999. Children receive deforming second and third degree burns from such accidents.

Protective screens can be installed around gas fireplaces to prevent injuries. By 2013, providing these screens will be mandatory. But many units purchased before this time will continue to be without protective screens.

The Children's Hospital Colorado Burn Center provided the following safety tips for those with gas fireplaces in their homes:

- Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions for safe use and maintenance of your appliance.
- Have a professional inspect your fireplace annually.
- If your gas fireplace came with a permanent screen, do not remove the screen for a better view of the fire. If it did not come with a screen, one should be installed.



- Make sure the on/off switch for the fireplace is not within reach of children.
- Tell all visitors that the glass panel reaches extremely high temperatures.
- After turning off the appliance, wait for it to cool down — approximately 45 minutes — before going near it.

Even if you take these precautions in your home, your young child can get burned at someone else's house or at a hotel. Discuss fireplace safety with your child, but do not assume that doing so is enough to protect from injury. Children always should be supervised and should not be allowed to play by a hot fireplace.

— Hilary Rasch

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