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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Prevent burns, fires when using space heaters

To keep energy costs down, families may be tempted to turn down the furnace and use a space heater to keep warm this winter. If you plan to use portable heaters, be careful when switching them on around children.

Although space heaters are safer now than in previous years, even modern models pose some risks. Every winter, newspapers carry stories of home fires and deaths caused by space heaters. Portable or fixed space heaters are involved in about 1,000 home heating fires and 100 home heating deaths annually, according to data from the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Children are at risk because they can accidentally bump into or knock over a heater when playing around it.

To protect children from injury, the American Academy of Pediatrics and fire safety experts offer the follow advice:

- **Be sure the heater is indicated for use indoors.** Electric heaters are the only unvented option for indoor use. Permanent vented gas or vented wood stoves, when installed properly, enable air pollutants to escape to the outdoors. Unvented combustion units should be used only outdoors in a well-ventilated area. Most states also have banned unvented kerosene heaters for indoor use, and at least five states have banned unvented natural gas heaters for indoor use because they can release toxic gas into the room.

- **Plug the space heater directly into a wall outlet and avoid using an extension cord.** The heater should be placed at least 3 feet from flammable objects, away from foot traffic and on a non-flammable flooring surface. Never use space heaters in the bathroom. Keep heaters and their cords out of reach of toddlers.

- **Turn off the heater when not in use, and do not use while sleeping.** Choose a heater with a switch that automatically shuts the unit off when it reaches a certain temperature or if it tips over.

- **Follow the manufacturer's instructions and choose a model that has a testing laboratory label.** Nationally recognized testing laboratories (e.g., Underwriter's Laboratory or "UL") verify that products meet government safety standards.



— Trisha Koriath

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