Help Yourself to a Healthy Home

You want to take good care of your family. You try to eat healthy foods. You take your children to the doctor for regular checkups. You try your best to protect your family from accidents and illness. You want to live in a safe neighborhood and home.

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- Is the air in your home clean and healthy?
- Do your children have breathing problems, like asthma?
- Is someone in your home allergic to mold?
- Do you know the signs of carbon monoxide poisoning?
- Is there lead anywhere in your home?
- Is your tap water safe to drink?
- Do you have household products with chemicals in them that can make you sick?
- Do you use bug spray or other products to keep away pests?
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Table of Contents

Why Should You Be Concerned?

Some of the most serious health problems for children may start at home. This booklet explains some of these health concerns and what you can do about them.

FACT

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Indoor Air Quality

% % ? The air inside can be more harmful to your family's health than the air outdoors. Air can be unhealthy if it has too many pollutants. Indoor air pollutants can be lots of things—from oven cleaner to cigarette smoke to mold. It is not always easy to tell if your home has unhealthy air. You may notice bad smells or see smoke, but you cannot see or smell other dangers, like carbon monoxide or radon. This chapter will help you learn if your home has healthy air. *See page 6.*

FACT

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Asthma & Allergies

Allergies and asthma are health problems that have a lot to do with the air you breathe. You and your children spend a lot of time at home, so the air inside needs to be clean. Does someone you live with smoke? Do you have pets? Is your basement damp? These may cause or add to breathing problems. *To learn more about asthma and allergies, see page 11.*

Mold & Moisture

Other health and safety problems may come from the air in your home too. Too much dampness causes mold to grow. Some mold is very harmful and some can make allergies or asthma worse. *See page 17 to find out more about mold.*

Carbon Monoxide

If they are not working right, stoves and heaters may cause a deadly gas called *carbon monoxide* to build up. You cannot see or smell this danger, but you can help keep your loved ones safe from carbon monoxide poisoning. *See page 23 to learn more about how to protect your family from carbon monoxide.*

Lead

? Some house paint and water pipes contain lead. This metal can poison your children. Most problems with lead come from old paint. Lead was also in gasoline and got into the soil and air from car exhaust. It's not used in these ways any more.

FACT

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Drinking Water

? Do you know where your drinking water comes from? If it comes from your own well, you need to make sure it is safe to drink. Have your water tested every year to make sure it does not have chemicals or other pollutants in it that can make your family sick. There are things you can do to take care of your well and keep the water clean. *See page 35 for ideas.*

You may get your drinking water from a water company or utility. They always test the water before they pipe it to you to make sure it is safe. You can ask the company or utility for a report on what the tests found. Even if it is o.k. at the water utility, water can still become unsafe after it comes into your home. *Look at page 33 to see if your water is safe to drink.*

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? Some products can harm your family's health if you do not use them in the right way. Common chemicals like bleach, rat poison, paint strippers, and drain cleaners can be dangerous. Children can poison themselves if they get into products like these. Even very small amounts of some chemicals can cause health problems if you touch them or breathe them in. Remember—if you spray or pump something, it goes right into the air. When you and yy

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Why Focus on Children?

. But there are special reasons to think about children:

- Children's bodies are still growing. Their young brains, livers, and other organs are more likely to be harmed by chemicals and other dangers than those of adults. If children get sick, it may be harder for them to get well because their immune systems are still developing.
- For their size, children eat more food, drink more water, and breathe more air than adults do. When they get lead in their bodies or breathe in harmful gases, they get a bigger dose than adults would.
- Children play and crawl on the ground. That means they are closer to many things that might cause health problems, like dust and chemicals. Babies and young children also put most everything in their mouths—things that might have chemicals or lead dust on them.

How to use this booklet...

This booklet asks questions about your home and how you live in it. By answering them, you can find out if your home is healthy or if you need to make some changes.

There are nine chapters in this booklet. Every chapter gives information about a topic, asks questions about it, and gives you simple Action Steps to protect your children's health. At the end of each chapter, you will find out where to get more help.

It's up to you—

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Should You Be Concerned?

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FAQ

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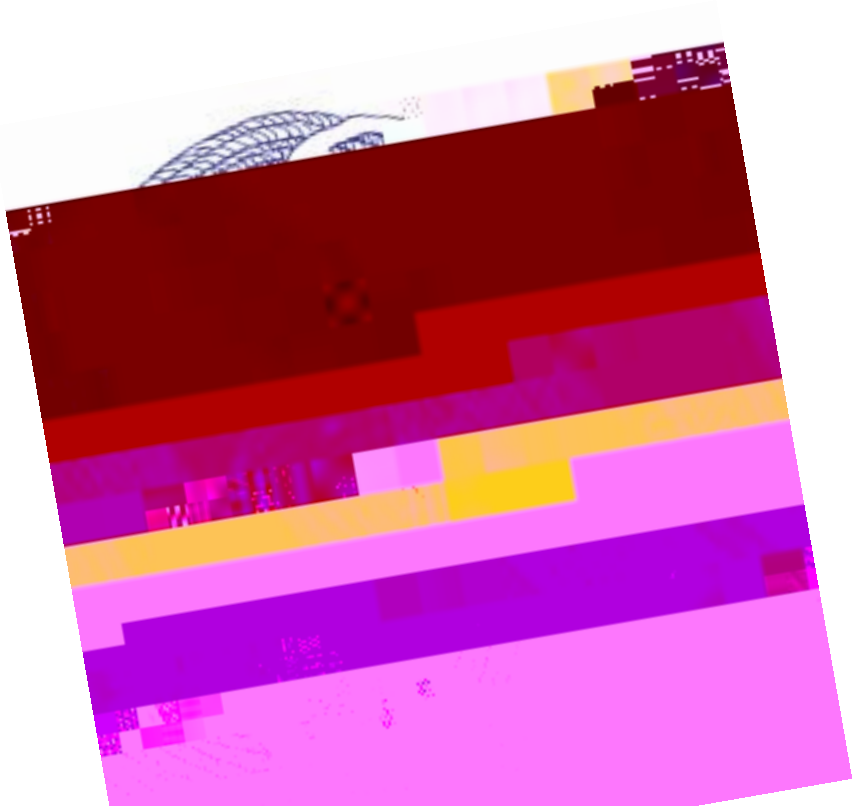

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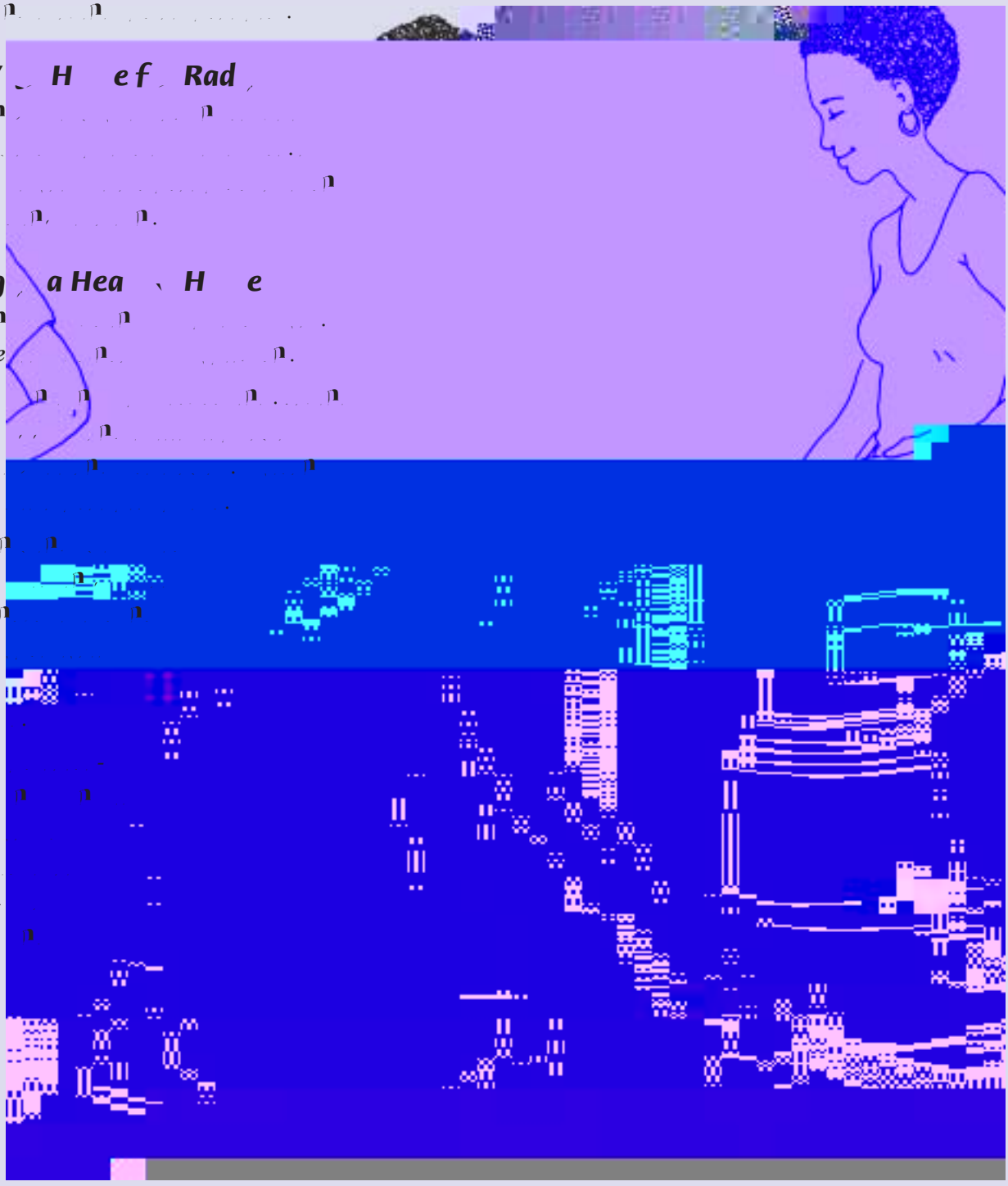

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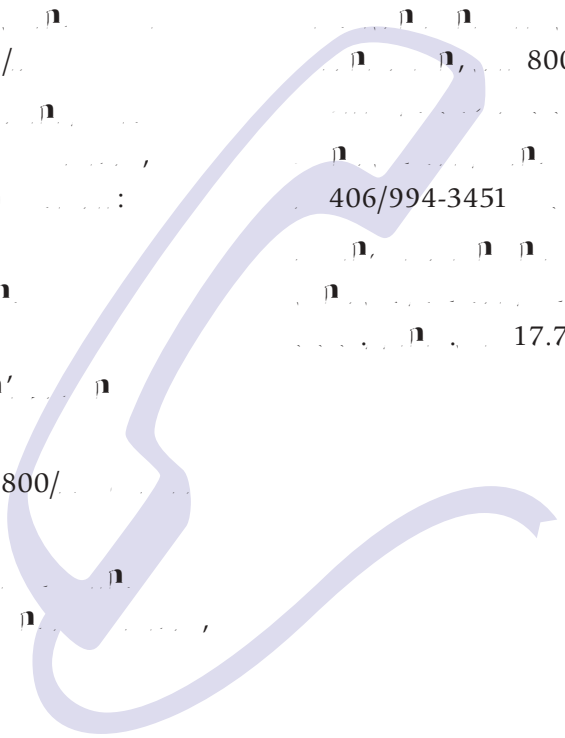

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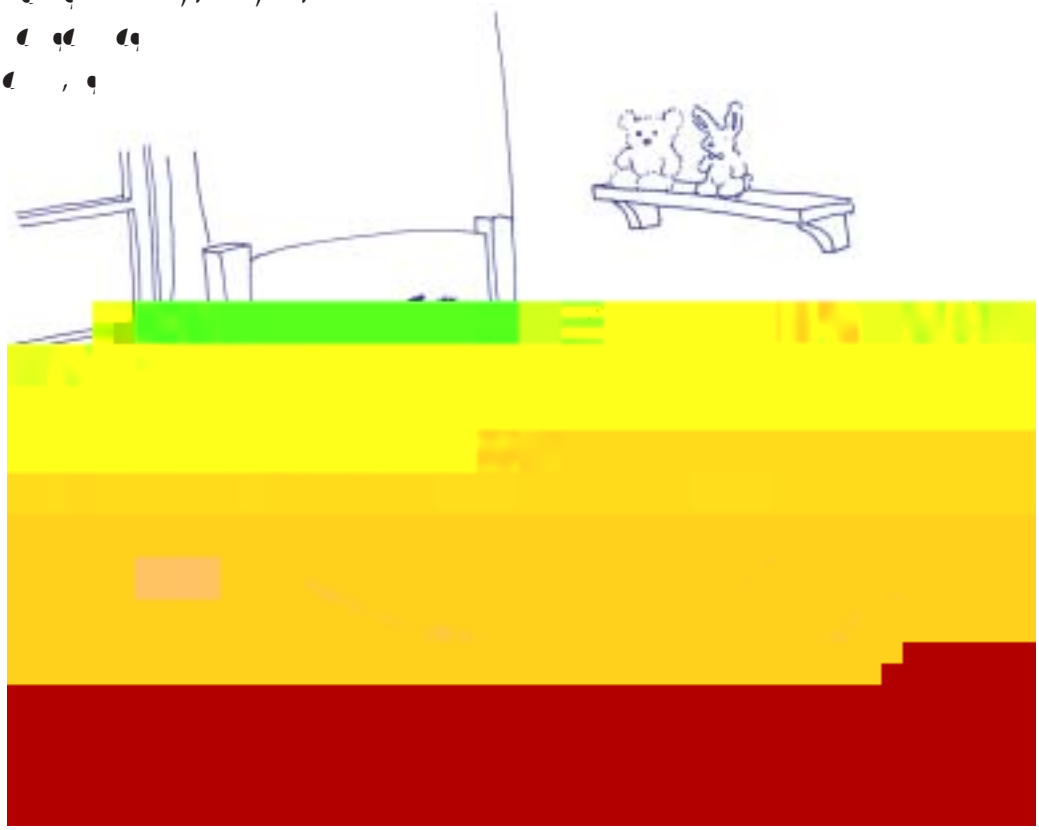

ACTION STEPS, continued

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- Keep surfaces clean and dry—wipe up spills and overflows right away.
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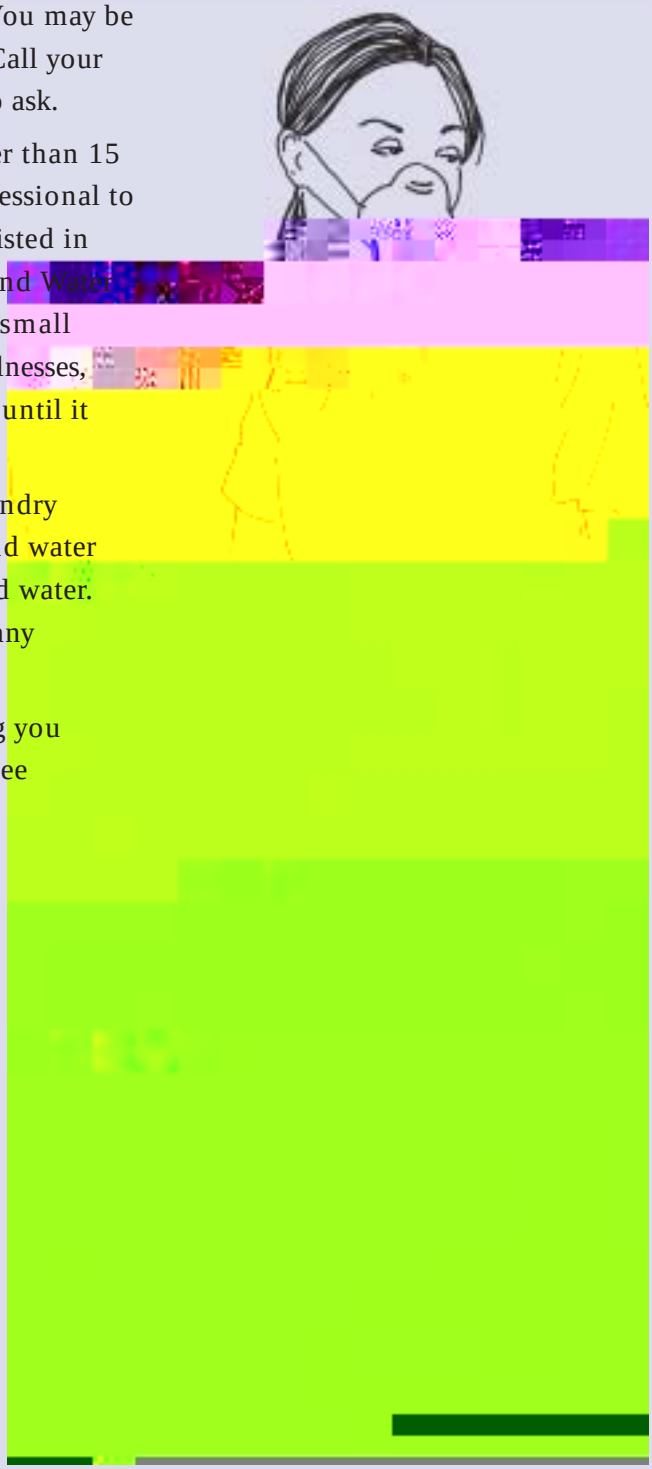
- After cleaning up mold, using a high efficiency (HEPA) vacuum or air cleaner may help to get rid of mold spores in the air. You may be able to borrow a HEPA vacuum. Call your local or state health department to ask.
- If you find an area of mold greater than 15 square feet, it's best to hire a professional to get rid of it. (You can find them listed in the telephone book under "Fire and Water Damage Restoration.") Remove small children, people with long-term illnesses, and older people from the home until it is cleaned up.
- Clean up mold with a mix of laundry detergent or dishwashing soap and water OR chlorine bleach with soap and water. Do not mix chlorine bleach with any product that contains ammonia.
- If you think mold may be causing you or your family health problems, see a doctor.



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Protect yourself when cleaning up mold. Wear long sleeves and pants,

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Clean hard surfaces with a mix of laundry detergent or dishwashing soap and water. You may have to scrub with a brush. Rinse the area with clean water and dry quickly by wiping away the water and using a fan. Chlorine bleach will kill mold growing on surfaces. It does not kill mold spores in the air and dead mold can still cause allergic reactions. If you use bleach, follow these steps:

- Scrub the surface first with water and detergent.
- Water down the chlorine bleach—use about one cup bleach to ten cups of water.
- Spray or sponge the bleach on the moldy area. Leave it on about 15 minutes, then rinse the area and dry quickly.
- Never mix chlorine bleach with products that contain ammonia or acids because you will make a deadly gas.
- Keep chlorine bleach out of the reach of pets and children.
- Remember, chlorine bleach takes the color out of most fabrics and rugs. Be careful not to spill or splash.

The Cooperative Extension Service or your local or state health department can provide more information on mold. Renters should talk to their landlords. Some home insurance policies will pay to fix mold damage. Fire and Water Damage Restoration professionals can help you fix the damage. Cleaning up a big mold problem may cost several hundred dollars or more.

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You may have heard about so-called “toxic” molds that can cause severe health problems. This may cause worry if you know that mold is growing in your home. See your doctor if you think mold is causing health problems for you or your family. Many experts agree that health problems come more from the length of time you’ve been in contact with the mold and the amount of mold in your home than the type of mold in your home.

No matter what kind of mold you have, you need to get rid of it and fix the moisture problems that made it grow. Most experts think it’s better to spend your time and money on cleaning up the problem than testing. So act quickly to get rid of the mold and moisture by following the action steps in this chapter.

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- Your local county Extension Office —look in your telephone book
- Your local or state health department —look in your telephone book
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) —www.epa.gov/iaq
- The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) —www.cdc.gov/nceh/asthma/factsheets/molds
- California Indoor Air Quality Program —www.cal-iaq.org//iaqsheet.htm
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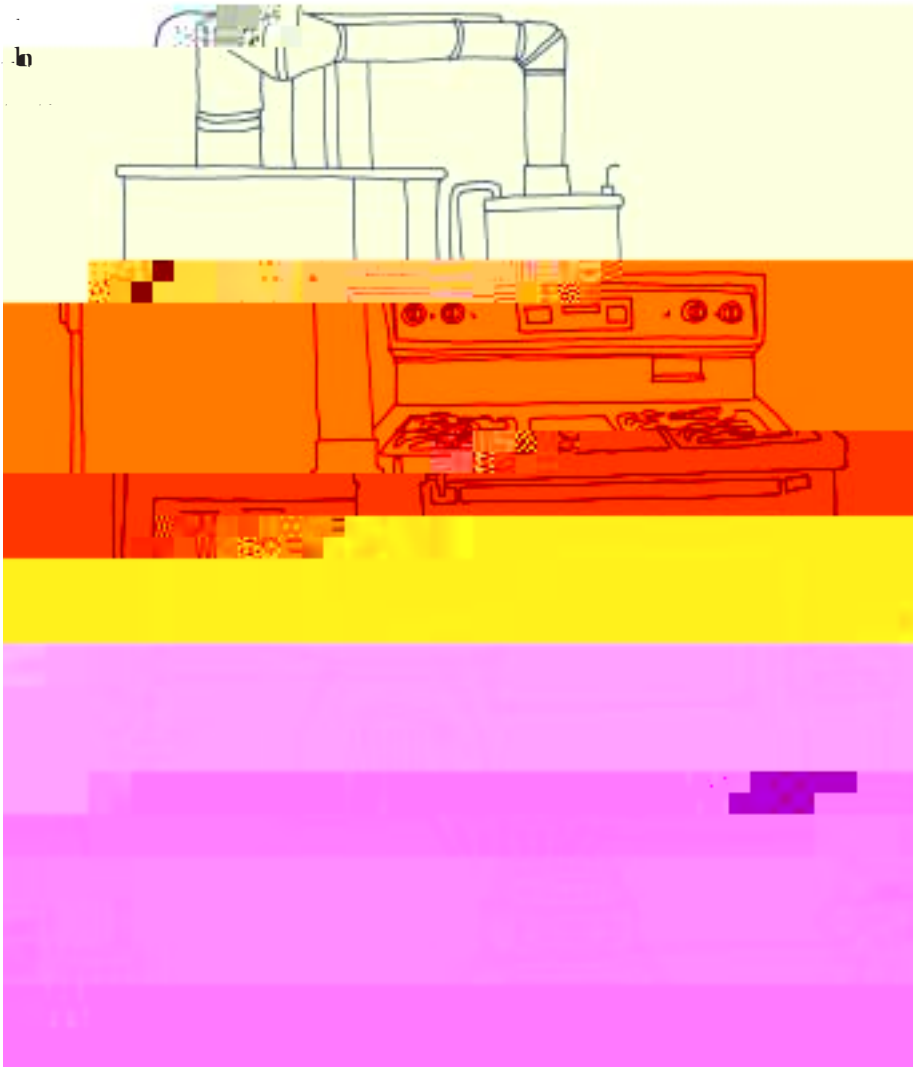

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What are the Signs of CO Poisoning?

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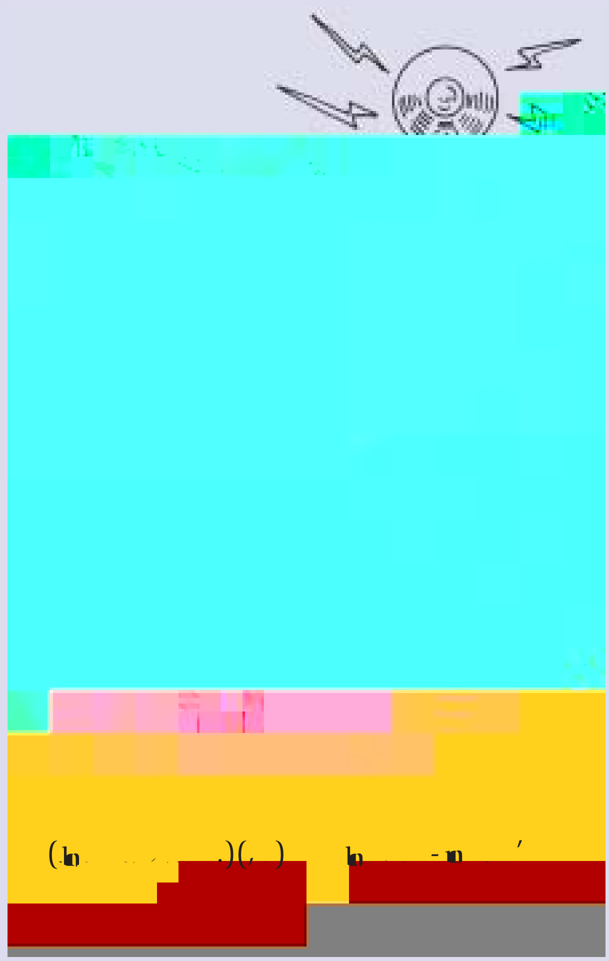
ACTION STEPS, continued

Carbon Monoxide Alarms



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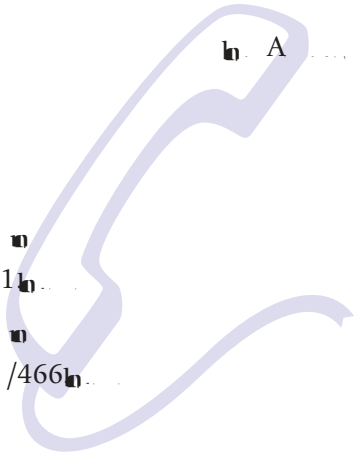

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Should You Be Concerned?

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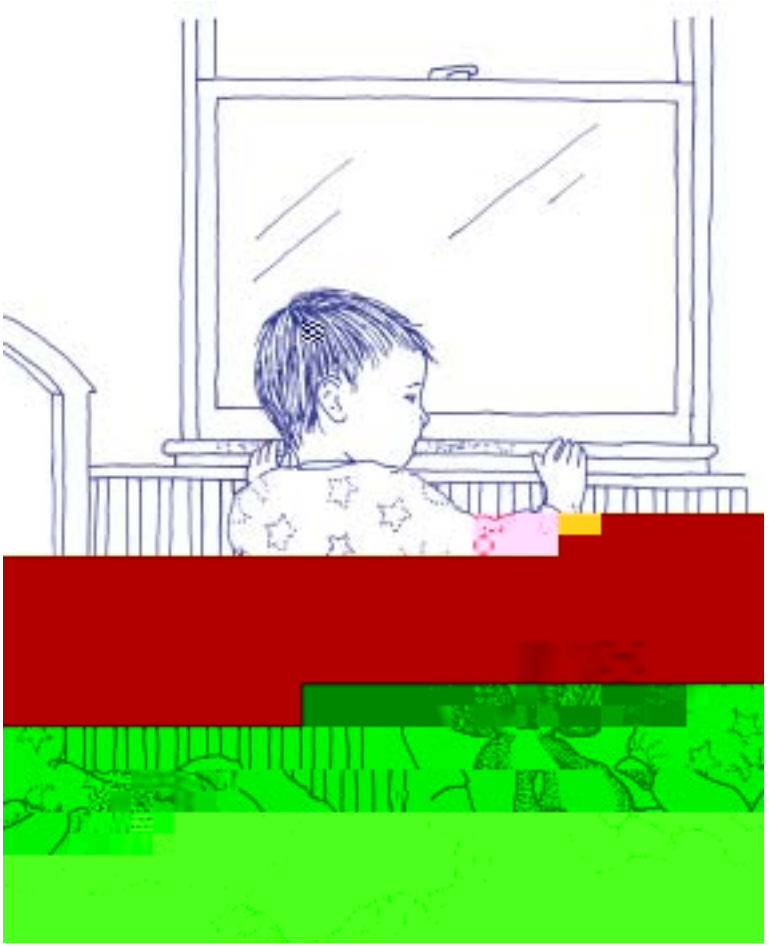

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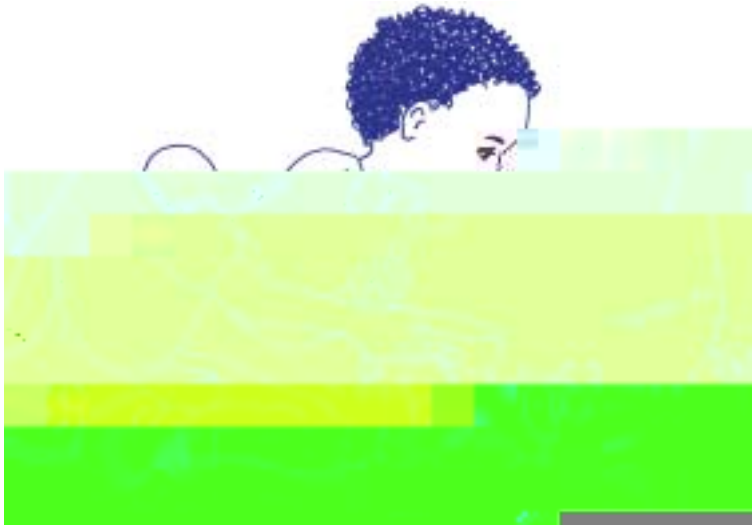

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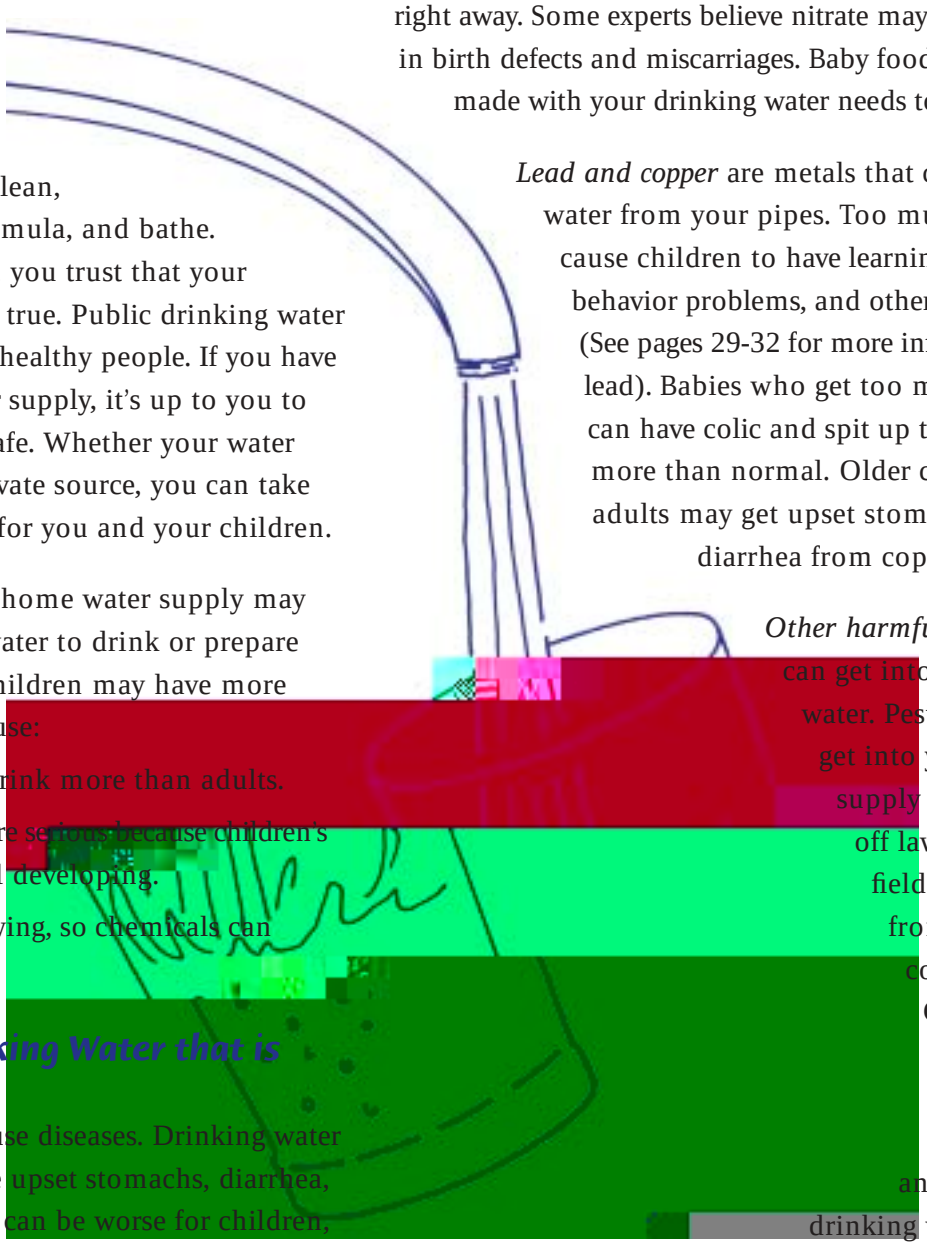
Drinking Water

Should You Be Concerned?

Every day Americans drink more than one billion glasses of water! We also depend on water in our homes to clean, cook, fix baby food and formula, and bathe. If you are like most people, you trust that your water is safe. This is mostly true. Public drinking water in the U.S. is safe for most healthy people. If you have a well or other private water supply, it's up to you to keep your drinking water safe. Whether your water comes from a public or private source, you can take steps to make sure it's safe for you and your children.



There are times when your home water supply may not be safe. Using unsafe water to drink or prepare food can make you sick. Children may have more problems than adults because:

- For their size, children drink more than adults.
- Their illnesses may be more serious because children's immune systems are still developing.
- Their bodies are still growing, so chemicals can harm them more.

What Ma be in Drinking Water that is Not Safe?

Bacteria and viruses can cause diseases. Drinking water with these germs may cause upset stomachs, diarrhea, or more serious illnesses. It can be worse for children, pregnant women, and sick or older people. Just one drink of water with these germs can make you sick.

Nitrate gets into water from animal and human waste, and from fertilizer. Too much nitrate in your drinking water can cause *blue baby syndrome* in babies under six months old. Babies with this problem often have blue or purple-colored faces because they do not get enough oxygen in their blood. They need to see a doctor right away. Some experts believe nitrate may also result in birth defects and miscarriages. Baby food or formula made with your drinking water needs to be safe.

Lead and copper are metals that can get into water from your pipes. Too much lead can cause children to have learning and behavior problems, and other illnesses (See pages 29-32 for more information on lead). Babies who get too much copper can have colic and spit up their formula more than normal. Older children and adults may get upset stomachs or diarrhea from copper.

Other harmful chemicals can get into drinking water. Pesticides may get into your water supply by washing off lawns and fields or leaking from storage containers. Gas or oil can seep into the ground and get into drinking water. Even very small amounts of some chemicals can cause problems, such as damage to kidneys, liver, or other organs. Some cause cancer and others can cause problems if you are pregnant.

Answer the questions on the next pages to find out if your water is safe and what you can do to cut down on risks to your family.

Where Does Your Water Come From?

Does your water come from a public water supply, such as the water utility in your city or town? Or do you have a private water supply, such as a well or spring? The questions to ask yourself depend on where your water comes from.

Public Water Supplies

Before reaching your home, water from a public water supply is tested for over 80 different chemicals. If there are problems, the utility has to treat the water to make it safe or tell you that the water is unsafe to drink.

Every year, water utilities give the results of these water tests to customers. They mail reports or print them in a local newspaper. You can also call your water utility to ask what chemicals are found in the water and how they treat it to make it safe.

Public water can become unsafe after it gets to your home through lead or copper pipes. What kind of pipes do you have?

Lead Pipes: Your home, especially if it is older, may have lead water pipes or pipes joined with lead solder. Lead pipes are dull gray and scrathch easily with a key.

Copper Pipes: You w

- Clean up after your dog. Don't leave pet waste on the ground where rain can wash the germs into rivers and lakes. It's best to flush it down the toilet.

Private Water Supplies

You may have a private water supply, such as a well, for your drinking water. Your well is your responsibility. You need to make sure it is clean and safe.

Test Your Well Water

Has it been more than two years since your water was tested? You cannot see, smell, or taste most problems so you need to have your water tested at a laboratory. Well water is usually tested for bacteria and nitrate. You may want to have your water tested more often or for other pollutants, like pesticides, if you have had problems in the past. Call your local or state health department to find out how to have your water tested.

Protect Your Water Suppl

You also need to take care of your well, especially if it is old.

Do you know where your well is?
Find your well. Is it uphill from animal pens, manure, pet waste, septic systems, dumps, or

ACTION STEPS, continued

- The well casing needs to stick up above the ground, up to 12 inches but local rules vary. Your local or state health department has the information.
- There should be no gaps or spaces between the well casing and the material or soil around it.
- Make sure the casing does not have holes or cracks.
- Does the well cap fit tightly? Are any openings or vents covered by a screen?
- Be sure there is not a low area near the well where rainwater can collect. Rainwater carrying pollutants can get into well water.
- Don't keep gas, oil, weed killer, or other chemicals in your well house.

Do you have unused wells on your property?
Unused wells that have not been properly filled and capped can let pollution into groundwater and make your drinking water unsafe. If you have an unused well, ask your local or state health department how to seal it.

Use devices on the ends of faucets to keep water from flowing back into your water supply.
These are called .
They help keep pollutants from washing back into the hose and into your drinking water.

What kind of pipes do you have?
See the section on "Clear the Pipes" on page 34 to find out how to make sure harmful metals are not getting into your drinking water from your pipes.

FACT

95% of people living in rural areas drink water from private sources.

When In Doubt, Check It Out!

- Call your local water company
- Call your local Cooperative Extension office
- Call your local or state health department
- Call EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline toll-free at 800/426-4791
- The *H *A* * handbook gives more details about this and other healthy home topics. 608/262-0024—www.uwex.edu/homeasyst

Notes

Do you have these products in your home? Bleach, rat

Use Safely

Do you use hazardous household products safely?

- Read the label. That is one of the most important steps in using products.
- Look for words like **caution, warning, flammable, harmful, danger, poison**. These tell you that a product may be hazardous. If you see these words on a label, take extra care.
- Look for special instructions on the label such as: "Work in well ventilated area." This means work outside or with the windows open. The fumes can make you sick if you do not have enough fresh air.
- "Wear protective clothing." This means wear goggles or safety glasses, gloves, long sleeves, or other coverings. The right clothing can prevent burns or keep chemicals from going into your body through the skin.
- Never mix products unless the label says it is safe to do it. For example, never mix products containing chlorine bleach with products containing ammonia. You will make a deadly gas by mixing these together.
- Keep children and pets away while you use hazardous products.
- Always put the cap back on and put away the product right after you finish using it.
- Never leave the product or container where children can see it or reach it.
- Don't eat, drink, or smoke when using hazardous products.
- Be ready in case there's an accident: Put the Poison Control Center telephone number, 800/222-1222, where you can find it quickly in case of an emergency. Tape it to the wall by your kitchen phone, for example.
- Buy *Syrup of Ipecac* at your local drugstore and keep it handy. This medicine makes a person throw up. But only use it when a doctor or the Poison Control Center tells you. Sometimes throwing up makes the poisoning worse.

Use Less

Can you cut down on the hazardous products in your home?

- Do you buy only what you need, so you don't have extras?
-

Store Safely

Do you store hazardous household products safely?

- Keep them

ACTION STEPS

Here are some ways to protect your family's health.

- Buy only what you need to do the job.
- Use products known to be safe when possible.
- Read and follow directions on product labels—always!
- Post the Poison Control Center telephone number next to the phone.
- Never mix two products together unless you are certain it is safe to do so.
- Never mix bleach and ammonia
- Keep all hazardous products, including bleach, in a cabinet out of reach of children.
- Buy products in childproof containers.
- Keep hazardous products in their original containers.
- Give leftover products to someone else to use.
- Find out about your community's hazardous waste collection points.
- Recycle products that you can—oil, antifreeze, products with mercury.
- Never burn or dump leftover products or containers.

When In Doubt, Check It Out!

- Call your local Poison Control Center 800/222-1222
- Call your local Cooperative Extension office
- Call your local or state health department
- Contact the Consumer Products Safety Commission: 800/638-2772—www.cpsc.gov
- Contact Healthy Indoor Air for America's Homes: 406/994-3451 or visit the website at www.montana.edu/wwwcxair/
- The *Home*A*Syst* handbook gives more details about this and other healthy home topics 608/262-0024—www.uwex.edu/homeasyst
- EPA's Consumer Labeling Initiative —www.epa.gov/opptintr/labeling/index.htm

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Should You Be Concerned?

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FACT

Almost one-half of homes with a child under five have pesticides stored within reach of children.

POISONED BY CHEMICALS:
Don't let this happen to your child

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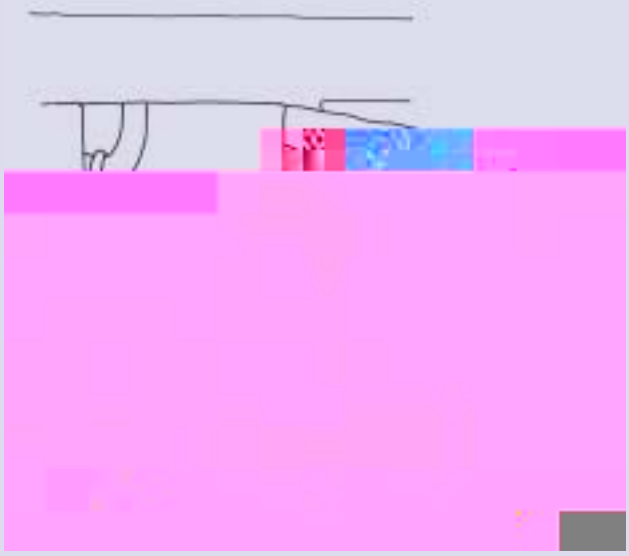
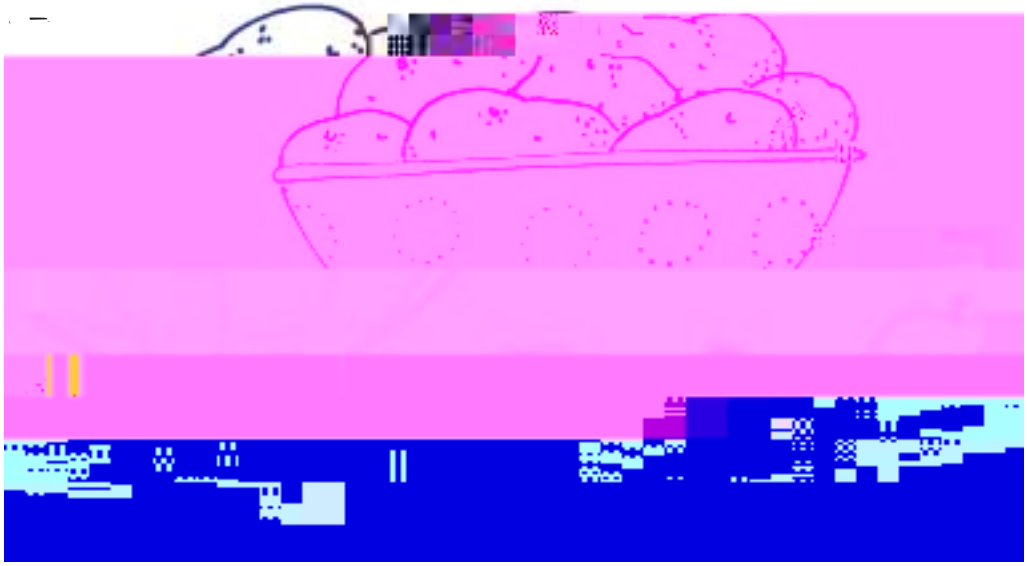


Why Do You Have Pests?

How Do You Store and Dispose of Pesticides?

Do You Use Pesticides Properly?



ACTION STEPS

Keep a Clean Home

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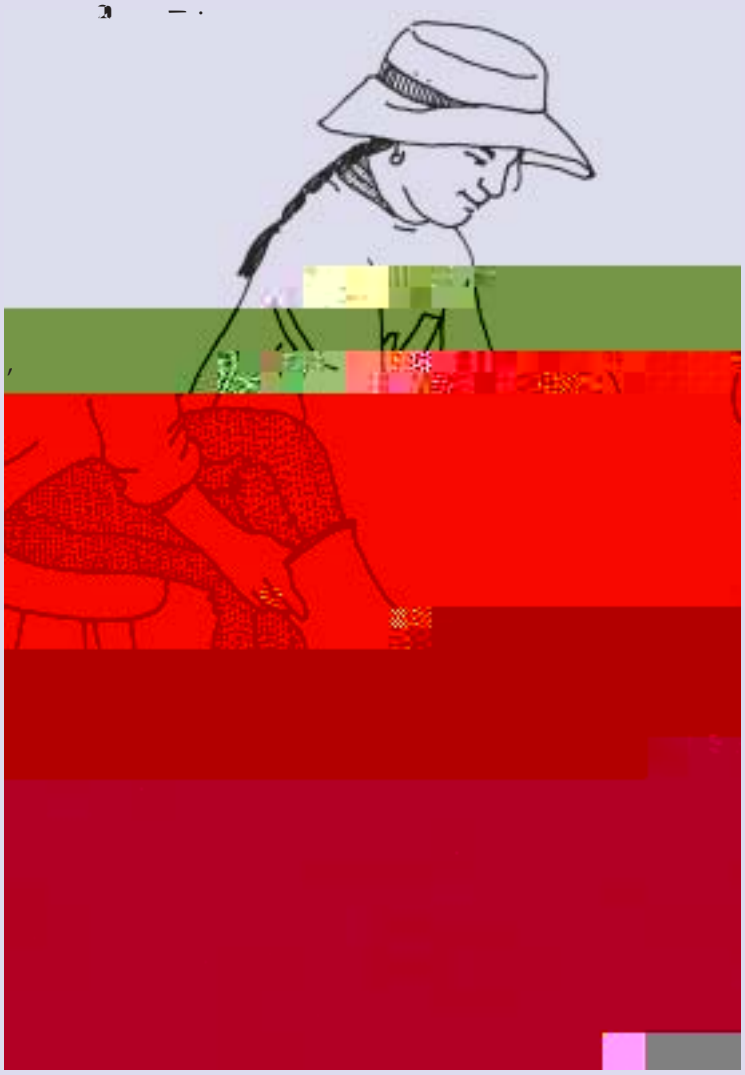


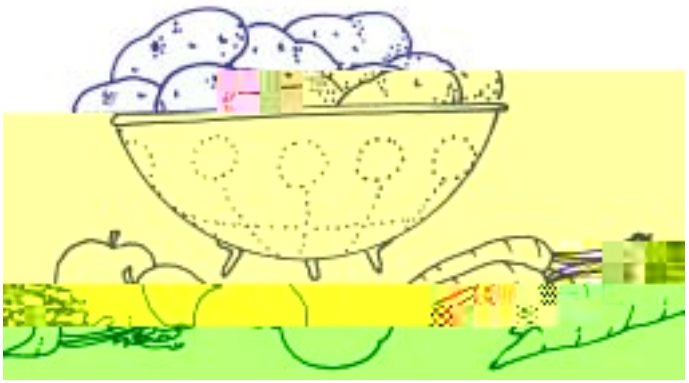
Keep Pests Out of Your Home

Use Pesticides Safely

Helpful Tips

Tips For Your Lawn and Garden

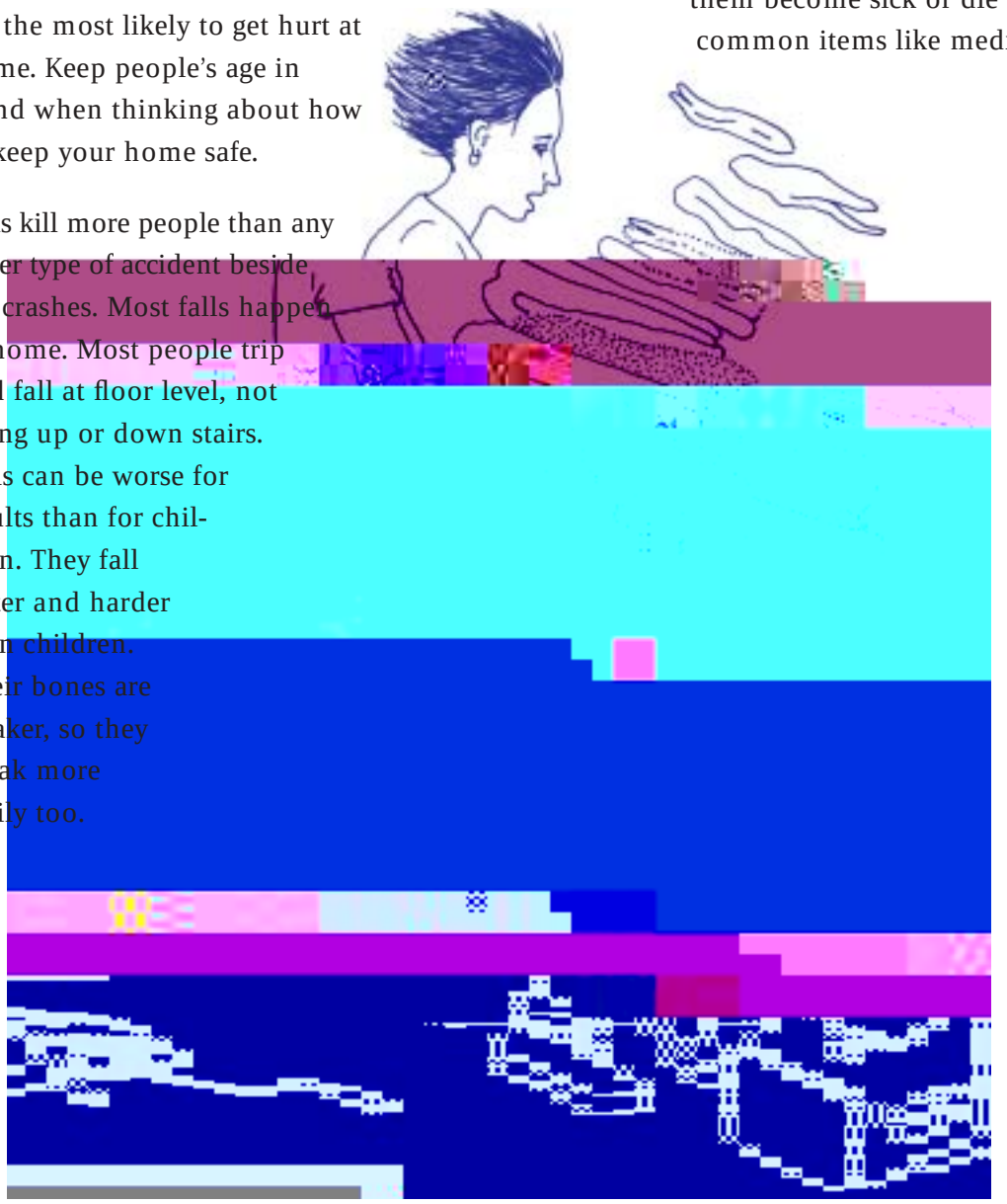
Tips For Preparing Food



When In Doubt, Check It Out!

Did you know that your chances of getting hurt at home are much higher than they are at work or school? The leading causes of death in the home are falls, drowning, fires, poisoning, suffocation, choking, and guns. The good news is that there are simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family. This section will help you ask questions to find out if your home is a safe place to live and how to make it even safer.

Very young children and older adults are the most likely to get hurt at home. Keep people's age in mind when thinking about how to keep your home safe.



Falls kill more people than any other type of accident beside car crashes. Most falls happen at home. Most people trip and fall at floor level, not going up or down stairs. Falls can be worse for adults than for children. They fall faster and harder than children. Their bones are weaker, so they break more easily too.

Young children are curious and get into everyday things that can hurt or even kill them. Over half of them become sick or die from eating or drinking common items like medicine, makeup, and plants.

Drowning kills more than 1,000 children ages 14 and under each year. For every child who drowns, another 20 children go to the hospital or emergency room because they almost drowned.

It takes just a few easy, fairly low-cost steps to keep your children safe from many everyday dangers. The questions below and on the next page will help you find safety problems at home. Page 51 will give you ideas about what to do. Remember, making your home safer for everybody may mean taking more than one step.

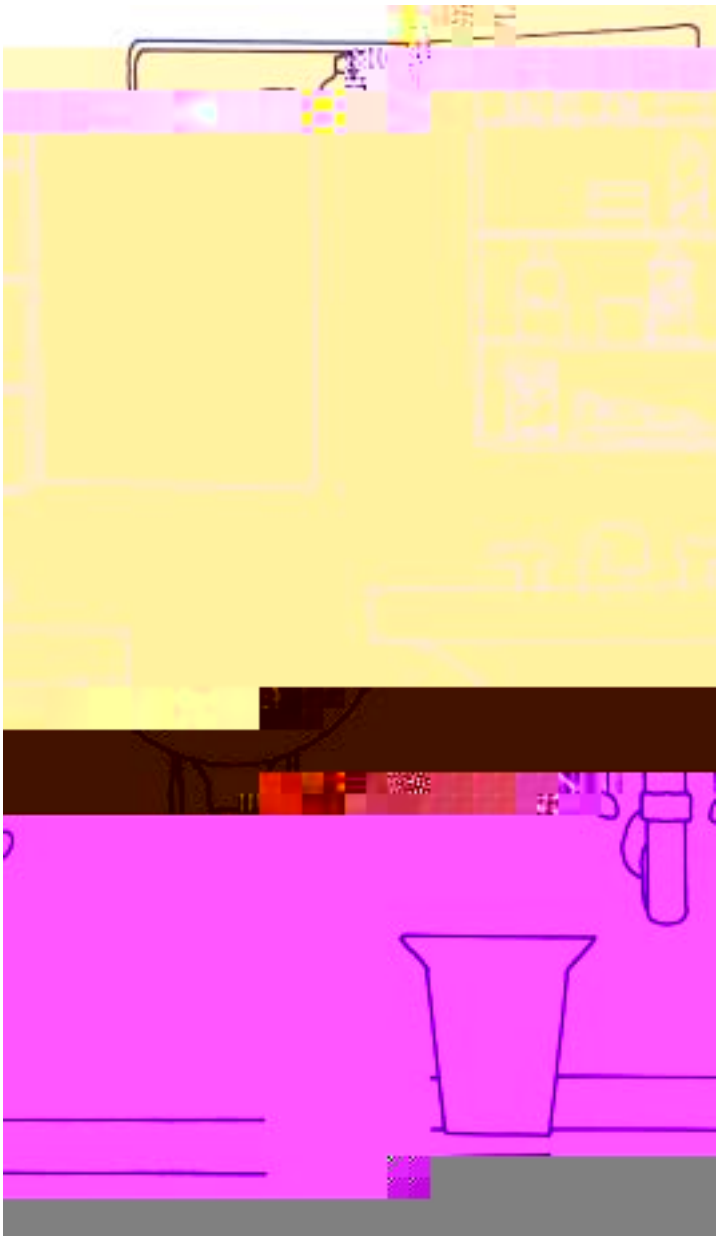
Slips, Trips, and Falls

- Do you keep your floors—especially hallways and stairs—free of things that might make people slip or trip?
- Are your stairs in good shape?
- Are there throw rugs in your home?
- Do you know the safe way to carry big loads?
- Is your home well lighted?

Is Your Home Poison-Proof?

To poison-proof your home, look through each room through the eyes of a child. Is anything that can hurt your child within her or his reach?

Any room can have something in it that can hurt a child: the kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms, living room, basement, garage, or laundry room. Most poisonous products are where people keep cleaning supplies. (See the chapters on Hazardous Household Products page 38 and Pesticides page 42 for more information.)



Fires and Burns

- Does your house or apartment have at least one smoke alarm?
- Where do you store matches and lighters?
- Have you talked about fire safety with your children?
- Do you have a fire exit plan in case your home catches fire?
- Do you use space heaters safely?

FACT

***Carbon monoxide** is deadly gas you can't see or smell. It comes from combustion appliances like gas heaters, furnaces, stoves or dryers. Car exhaust also has carbon monoxide. See the chapter on carbon monoxide on page 23 to learn how to protect your family from this hidden danger.*

***To protect your family**, put in a carbon monoxide alarm!*

Choking

- Do you keep a close eye on young children at meals and at playtime?
- Do you pick out toys that are right for your child's age?

Young children like to put things in their mouths. Balloons, toys, and toy parts that are small enough to fit into a child's mouth may cause choking. You also may not be able to get them out if they get stuck.

Watch Out Around Water

- Do you have a pool or does your child go swimming a lot?
- Does the pool you use have a fence around it?
- Do you ever leave toys in the pool?
- Does your child run around the pool?
- Do you ever visit lakes, beaches, or rivers?
- Do you watch your young children in the bathtub?

Pools are very dangerous for infants and toddlers. A toddler who falls in may die or get brain damage. Toddlers love to play in the water. But they don't know that even shallow water can hurt or kill them. Running children can fall down and hurt themselves badly. Children need to be watched around water at all times.

ACTION STEPS

Prevent Slips, Trips, & Falls

- Keep your floors clear of anything that may cause tripping. Pick up hazards such as toys, shoes and magazines.
- Clean up spills right away so people won't slip.
- Repair any stairs that are cracked or worn.
- If there are rugs in your home, use non-skid mats and throw rugs.
- When carrying large or heavy loads, make sure you can see where you're going. Ask for help if you need it.
- Keep your home well lit so you can see where you're walking at night.

Other tips

- Don't use chairs or tables as makeshift ladders.
- Wear shoes with non-skid soles and put young children in non-skid socks.
- Teach your children not to run indoors or

ACTION STEPS

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-proof,

Do you know what to do if someone in your home gets poisoned? If you think someone has been poisoned, *call your local Poison Control Center right away at 1-800-222-1222*. Keep this number next to *all* of your telephones. Make sure you know:

- Brand-name of product
- Type of product
- Contents as listed on label
- About how much the person ate or drank
- How the person came in contact with the poison (mouth, skin, etc.)
- How long the person was in contact with the poison
- The person's age and weight
- How you tried to help the person, if you did

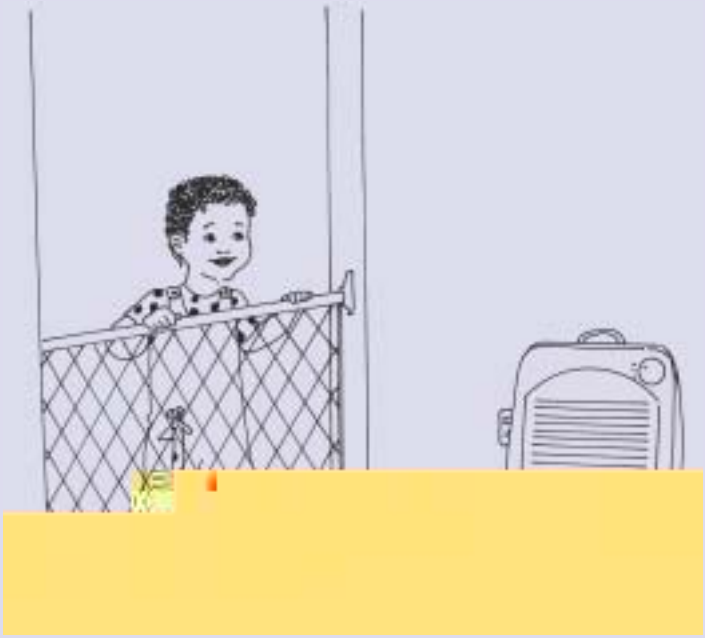
Prevent Fires and Burns

Put in a smoke alarm on every floor of your home in or near every sleeping area. This will cut in half the chances of someone dying in a fire.

Playing with fire—matches, lighters, stoves or heaters—is the leading cause of fire-related death for children five and under. Storing matches, lighters, and other heat sources in a safe place like a locked drawer will help keep your children from playing with them. Don't let children play near the stove or grill either.

Teach your children how to prevent fires, and what to do if there is a fire. It can make the difference between life and death. Talk about fire safety with your children. Your local fire department can help.

Plan and practice a fire escape route with your family. Do this at night and with the lights off so you'll be ready if there is a fire. Take special steps for getting children, the elderly, and people



ACTION STEPS

Prevent Choking and Suffocation

Everyday foods can cause choking. Hot dogs, nuts, popcorn, and hard candy can easily get stuck in a small child's throat. Don't let your young children eat them. Even drinks, like formula, milk, or juice can make babies choke if they drink them lying down, especially from a bottle. Make sure children drink sitting up. Keep a close eye on the young children in your home.

Don't let your children play with balloons. Other household items that can cause problems are coins, marbles, and buttons, so keep your floor picked up. Finally, don't let children play near cars or old appliances. They can suffocate and die if they become trapped in a car trunk or old refrigerator.

Young children can get tangled up and suffocate in curtains, window blind cords, and extension cords. Plastic bags and covers are also dangerous. Don't tie toys or pacifiers to children's clothes. Very small children should not wear jewelry around their necks.

Toys with small parts or long cords may strangle or cause a child under the age of four to choke. Read a toy's package to make sure it's right for your child.

Watch Out Around Water

If you have or use a pool—Watch children under the age of 12 at all times around pools. Make sure they walk on the pool deck.

All pools, hot tubs, and spas should have a fence at least five feet high, with a self-closing, self-latching gate around them. It's important that this fence be one that children cannot climb. Don't think of your home as part of the fence, because children can open doors to get to a pool.

Take all toys out of the pool area after swimming so children won't go back into the water and play by themselves.

Children should wear life jackets or vests

ACTION STEPS

Other Safety Concerns

- Older children and adults should learn first aid and CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) so they can help if someone gets hurt. Your local Red Cross offers classes.
- Never let children ride on equipment such as lawn tractors. They may get hurt if they fall off.
- Get safety gear like helmets and kneepads for children riding bicycles, in-line skates, ATVs, scooters, and skateboards. Set a good example by wearing safety gear yourself.
- Store guns safely—unloaded and locked up.
- When traveling by car, make sure that children under 12 ride in the back seat. Use car seats for infants and toddlers under 40 pounds. Use booster seats for children until they are eight years old.

W I D , C I O !

- Your local county Extension Office —look in your telephone book
- Your local or state health department —look in your telephone book
- For information on product recalls: The Consumer Products Safety Commission at 800/638-2772 —www.cpsc.gov
- National SAFE KIDS Campaign, 202/662-0600 —www.safekids.org, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Ste. 1000, Washington DC 20004
- The American Red Cross—www.redcross.org
- National Safety Council, 612/285-1121 —www.nsc.org

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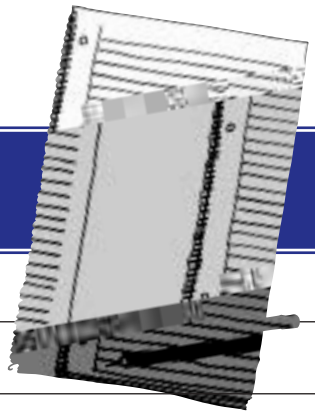

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