

Fire and Burn Prevention in Home Health

Fire Prevention in Home Healthcare



Your home is probably the place where you feel safest. Did you know that your home is also where you are most likely to die in a fire? Four out of five fire-related deaths occur in the home. This document provides you with fire prevention strategies you can use to help keep you and your home healthcare patients safe.

Cooking Fire Safety

Cooking is the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries. Unattended cooking accounts for one-third of all cooking fires. Most cooking fires start with the ignition of common household items, such as food or grease, cabinets, wall coverings, paper, plastic bags and curtains.

Cooking Fire Safety Tips

Share these cooking fire safety tips with home healthcare patients and their families:

- Never cook when wearing oxygen or while under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or sedating medication.
- Never leave cooking food unattended.
- Keep cooking areas clean and the stove top clear of items that may catch on fire, such as dishtowels, pot holders and paper towels.
- Keep children and pets at least three feet away from the cooking area.
- Wear clothing with tight fitting sleeves.

Cooking Fire Safety Tips, continued

- Do not use a turkey fryer to cook food.
- Cook food at the indicated temperature and not at higher settings.
- Regularly clean cooking equipment to prevent accumulation of grease or food items.
- Peel back coverings carefully from cooked foods to prevent steam burns.
- Never use aluminum foil or metal objects in a microwave oven. They can cause arcing and fires.
- Do not overfill a pan or pot with oil. Leave enough room to allow for food to be added.
- Heat food in microwaves using only containers intended for microwave use.
- Keep a working fire extinguisher in the kitchen.
- Place a box of baking soda and a large pot lid next to your stove when cooking.
- Move flammable liquids stored near stoves to a safe, distant location.

What To Do in the Event of a Kitchen Fire

- For a pan fire, smother the flames with a potholder, oven mitt and/or lid that are kept handy. Shut off the heat. Keep the pan covered until the oil cools to prevent it from starting again.
- Never pour water on a grease fire, as it will cause the fire to spread.
- Never discharge a fire extinguisher onto a pan fire because it can spread the fire by spraying or shooting burning grease around the kitchen.
- If oil starts to boil, remove it from the heat source - especially on an electric stovetop.
- For an oven fire, keep the oven door closed and turn off the heat.
- To contain a microwave fire, turn it off, keep the door closed and unplug the microwave.

Heating Equipment Fire Safety

Heating equipment is the second leading cause of home fires during the months of December, January and February, accounting for 43 percent during those months. Space heaters cause the majority of fire-related deaths (excluding fireplaces, chimneys and chimney connectors). The leading cause of home heating fires and deaths is heating equipment being placed too close to household items that can burn, such as upholstered furniture, clothing, mattresses or bedding.

Space Heater Fire Safety Tips

Share these space heater fire safety tips with home healthcare patients and their families:

- Plug electric-powered space heaters directly into an outlet with sufficient capacity. Do not use an extension cord.
- Use the proper grade of the proper fuel for a liquid-fueled space heater, and never use gasoline in any heater not approved for gasoline use. Refuel the heater only in a well-ventilated area and when the equipment is cool.
- Keep portable heaters at least three feet away from household items that can burn, such as clothing, bedding, furniture or curtains.
- Remember to turn off space heaters:
 - Whenever the room is not occupied
 - Under any circumstances that the manufacturer's instructions state it should be turned off
 - Before going to bed

Fireplace / Wood Stove Safety

Share these fireplace and wood stove fire safety tips with home healthcare patients and their families:

- Use only dry, seasoned wood in a fireplace or wood stove to avoid the build-up of creosote. Do not use artificial logs in wood stoves. Creosote is an oily deposit that catches fire easily and accounts for most chimney fires and a large share of home heating fires.
- Use only kindling wood or paper to start a fire. Do not use a flammable liquid.
- Place a sturdy screen in front of a fireplace to prevent sparks from flying into the room.
- Allow ashes from a fireplace or wood stove to completely cool before disposing of them in a metal container that is stored a safe distance from the home.

General Home Fire Safety

Share these general home fire safety tips with home healthcare patients and their families:

- Do not use the kitchen oven to heat the home.
- Vent fuel-burning equipment to the outside, making sure the vent path is clear and unobstructed. Seal the exit points around the vent to make sure deadly carbon monoxide does not build up in the home.

General Home Fire Safety, continued

- Inspect and clean all heating equipment annually.
- Install a carbon monoxide alarm outside each sleeping area, as well as in a central location in the house.
- Test smoke detectors monthly and change the batteries every 6 months.
- Clean smoke detectors (with a vacuum cleaner, if possible) to remove dust and cobwebs to help maintain their sensitivity to smoke.
- Replace any smoke detector that is more than 10 years old.
- Remove piles of stored newspapers or other rubbish. Newspapers stored in a damp, warm place may ignite spontaneously.
- Check for overloaded electrical outlets and old or frayed extension cords.
- Do not store flammable liquids (cleaning fluids, contact adhesives, etc.) or aerosols near a stove or other heat source. Remember, even a pilot light can set vapors on fire.

Carbon Monoxide Safety

If you heat your home or cook with any fuel, carbon monoxide is a potential safety hazard. Carbon monoxide (CO) is an invisible, odorless, colorless gas created when fuel (such as gasoline, wood, coal, natural gas, propane, oil and methane) burns incompletely. CO enters the body through breathing and can cause poisoning symptoms that include shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, light headedness or headaches. High levels of CO can be fatal and cause death within minutes. In the home, heating and cooking equipment that burn fuel are potential sources of carbon monoxide. Vehicles or generators running in an attached garage can also produce dangerous levels of CO.

Carbon Monoxide Safety Tips

Share these carbon monoxide safety tips with home healthcare patients and their families:

- Install CO alarms inside the home in a central location and outside each sleeping area.
- Test CO alarms monthly and replace them according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Have a heating professional inspect fuel-burning heating equipment (fireplaces, furnaces, water heaters, wood/coal stoves, space heaters) and chimneys every year before cold weather sets in.
- When using a fireplace, open the flue for adequate ventilation.
- Have a qualified technician inspect the integrity of heating and cooking systems, as well as the sealed spaces between the garage and house.

Carbon Monoxide Safety Tips, continued

- Do not run a vehicle, generator or other fueled engine or motor in a garage – even if the garage doors are open.
- During and after a snowstorm, make sure vents for the dryer, furnace, stove and fireplace are clear of snow build-up. Make sure vehicle exhaust pipes are clear of snow as well.
- Use barbecue grills outdoors; never use them in the home, garage or near building openings.

Candle Fire Safety

Candles can add ambience to a room. They can also be a cause of home fires. More than half of home candle fires occurred when some flammable material was too close to a burning candle. December has almost twice the number of home candle fires than any other month. To prevent home fires when burning candles, here are some steps you can take:

Candle Fire Safety Tips

Share these candle fire safety tips with home healthcare patients and their families:

- Keep all open flames away from flammable liquids and also from patients receiving home oxygen therapy.
- Blow out all candles when leaving a room or going to sleep.
- Avoid using candles in bedrooms and sleeping areas.
- Keep flammable materials at least one foot away from a burning candle.
- Use a sturdy candle holder that is made from a material that cannot burn, won't easily tip over and collects dripping wax.
- Keep candle wicks trimmed to one-quarter inch.
- Extinguish taper and pillar candles when they get to within two inches of the holder and extinguish votives and containers before the last half-inch of wax starts to melt.
- Avoid carrying a lit candle or match during a power outage. It is safer to use a flashlight.

Clothes Dyer Fire Safety

Clothes dryers account for many home fire incidents. The leading cause of a clothes dryer fire is failure to clean the dryer. The next most common causes of clothes dryer fires are mechanical and electrical system malfunction. Almost one-third of the dryer fires start with the clothing catching on fire and one-quarter result from dust, fiber or lint catching on fire.

Clothes Dryer Fire Safety Tips

Share these clothes dryer fire safety tips with home healthcare patients and their families:

- Do not operate a clothes dryer without a lint filter.
- Clean lint filters before or after each use and remove any accumulated lint from around the drum.
- Plug the dryer into an outlet suitable for its electrical needs.
- Keep the dryer area clear of any items that can burn (i.e., folded clothing or boxes).
- Inspect gas-powered dryers regularly to ensure that the gas line and connection are intact.
- Turn the dryer off when leaving the home or going to bed.

Portable Generator Fire Safety

Portable generators are useful during power outages. However, using a portable generator can be risky due to the threat of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning, electrical shock and fires.

Portable Generator Fire Safety Tips

Share these portable generator fire safety tips with home healthcare patients and their families:

- Operate a portable generator outdoors in a well-ventilated area and away from all doors, windows and vent openings.
- Locate a generator so that the exhaust fumes cannot enter the home through windows, doors or other openings.
- Monitor for CO with battery operated or plug-in CO alarms. Make sure plug-in alarms have a battery back-up.
- Do not refuel a generator while it is running. Turn off the generator and let it cool down before refueling.
- Store fuel for a generator outside of the home in properly-labeled safety containers.
- Plug appliances directly into the generator or use a heavy duty outdoor-rated extension cord that is free of cuts or tears and has all three prongs, especially a grounding pin. Do not try to power the house wiring by plugging the generator into a wall outlet.

Child Home Fire Safety

Children, especially preschoolers, cause thousands of injuries per year by playing with matches and lighters. Children often start fires by playing with candles, fireworks, stoves and cigarettes. The majority of fatal home fires are caused by children igniting bedding, mattresses, upholstered furniture or clothing. Just over half of the child-play fires in the home start in a bedroom. Keep matches and lighters up high, out of children's sight and reach; preferably in a locked location.

Child Home Fire Safety Tips

Share these child home fire safety tips with home healthcare patients and their families:

- Use only lighters with child-resistant safety features.
- Do not use lighters or matches as a source of play or amusement for children, as these behaviors could be imitated.
- Teach children that matches and lighters are for adults only. Instruct them to tell an adult if they see matches or lighters.

Smoking Fire Safety

Smoking materials (cigarettes, pipes, etc.) are the leading cause of home fire deaths in the United States, killing between 700 and 900 people per year – both smokers and non-smokers. Careless smoking is the leading cause of fire deaths. The most common materials ignited in home smoking-related fire deaths are mattresses and bedding, upholstered furniture and floor coverings.

Smoking Fire Safety Tips

Share these smoking fire safety tips with home healthcare patients and their families:

- Never smoke in bed or when tired, consuming alcohol or taking medication with sedative properties.
- Smoke outside whenever possible.
- Use deep, wide ashtrays and place them on a sturdy table.
- Never empty ashtrays into the garbage. Before throwing out butts and ashes, make sure they are out by dousing them in water or sand.
- Never smoke in a home where oxygen therapy is being administered.
- Choose to smoke fire-safe cigarettes as they are less likely to cause fires.

Plan Your Escape

Ideally, any home you work in should have a home fire escape plan that is practiced regularly. Here are some tips you can share with patients and their families regarding escape planning.

- Make sure caregivers, patients and family members know how to "stop, drop and roll." They should also know two ways out of each room. If they encounter thick smoke, they should understand the need to crawl on hands and knees to safety.
- In the event of a fire, plan to call the fire department from a neighbor's home and meet other members of the family at a designated meeting spot outside.
- Designate a relative or friend out of the area through whom family can share information.
- Practice "Emergency Drills In The House" (EDITH) on a regular basis.
- Make sure patients and family members know how to use a fire extinguisher and where they are stored in the home.
- Show responsible family members how and where to turn off the utilities (water, gas, and electricity) at the main switches.

Sources:

Information in this document was adapted from recommendations of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, the U.S. Fire Administration, the National Fire Protection Agency, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

