

# Childproofing the Home

*Inexpensive safety devices can help protect youngsters*

By Pam Blair

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, 2.5 million children are injured or killed by hazards in the home each year.

Many incidents can be prevented by using child safety devices. Remember, though: No device is completely childproof. Consider these devices:

- **Safety latches and locks.** Securing kitchen cabinets and bathroom drawers can help prevent children from getting into medicines, household cleaners, knives and other sharp objects. Look for devices adults can easily install and use, but sturdy enough to withstand pulls and tugs from children.

- **Safety gates.** Help prevent falls down stairs and keep children away from dangerous areas. Look for gates children cannot dislodge easily, but that adults can open and close without difficulty. For the top of stairs, gates that screw to the wall are more secure than “pressure gates.” If you have an older safety gate, be sure it does not have “V” shapes large enough for a child’s head and neck to fit into.

- **Door knob covers and door locks.** Prevent children from entering rooms and other areas with possible dangers. Be sure the cover is sturdy enough not to break, but allows a door to be opened quickly

by an adult in case of emergency. To prevent access to swimming pools, door locks should be placed high, out of reach of young children. Locks should be used in addition to fences and door alarms.

- **Anti-scald devices.** Regulating water temperature at faucets and showerheads can help prevent burns. Set the water heater temperature to 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

- **Smoke detectors.** These are essential safety devices, and should be used on every level of your home and near bedrooms. Check smoke detectors once a month to make sure they are working. If detectors are battery-operated, change batteries at least once a year, or consider using 10-year batteries.

- **Window guards and safety netting.** Using these for balconies and decks can help prevent serious falls. There should be no more than four inches between the bars of the window guard. Be sure at least one window in each room can be easily used for escape in a fire.

- **Corner and edge bumpers.** These can be used with furniture and fireplace hearths to help prevent injuries from falls or to soften falls against sharp or rough edges. Look for bumpers that stay in place.

- **Outlet covers and plates.** These can help protect children from electrical shock and possible electrocution. Be sure the outlet protectors cannot be easily removed by children and are large enough so children cannot choke on them.

- **Carbon monoxide (CO) detector.** Consumers with gas or oil heat or with attached garages should install CO detectors near sleeping areas.

- **Window blind cords.** Use safety tassels and inner cord stops to help prevent children from strangling in blind cord loops. For older mini-blinds, cut the cord loop, remove the buckle and put safety tassels on each cord. Be sure older vertical blinds and drapery cords have tension or tie-down devices to hold the cords tight.

- **Door stops and door holders.** Using these on doors and door hinges can help prevent small fingers and hands from being pinched or crushed. Be sure the device is easy to use and is not likely to break into small parts, which could be a choking hazard.

- **Cordless phone.** This helps you watch your child, without leaving the vicinity to answer a call. ■



Outlet covers protect little fingers from electrical shock.

Photo by Mike Teegarden