Home Safe Home
Protect Your Child From Unseen Toxins

Keeping Kids Safe in Cyberspace

A Fall Back Plan for Fire Safety

Check out our healthy living tips in the Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org.
**Get Skin Care Savvy**

You notice a dry, scaly rash on your infant’s skin. After applying lotion, the rash doesn’t go away. Could it be eczema?

Eczema, also called atopic dermatitis, usually appears as a dry, inflamed, itchy rash and affects about 10 to 15 percent of children. According to the experts at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, children with a family history of atopic dermatitis, asthma or seasonal allergies have a greater chance of developing eczema.

Learning how to recognize eczema can keep you aware of any changes in your child’s skin.

“Eczema usually presents with dry, itchy and inflamed skin,” says Kimberly Horii, MD, Dermatology at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Associate Professor of Pediatrics/Dermatology at the UMKC School of Medicine. “Using a fragrance-free ointment or cream-based moisturizer on the entire body several times a day is extremely important.

Aside from a moisturizer, your physician may recommend a topical steroid to be used on the areas of eczema. Oral antihistamines may also help with itching.”

For some children, eczema disappears as they grow older, while others may experience recurrences throughout adolescence and adulthood.

**Possible Triggers**

Talk with your child’s pediatrician about what may cause the rash and limit your child’s exposure to irritants. Common irritants include:

- allergens, such as pollen, mold, dust and animal dander
- overly dry skin
- certain fabrics, soaps or detergents.

To learn about recommended skin care products for eczema, visit www.childrensmercy.org and search for “eczema.”

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**Monster Mash Bash**

Treat your children to a Halloween party this year for safe, healthy fun your family can enjoy together.

Healthy Halloween parties allow children to dress in costume and have fun while eliminating concerns commonly associated with the holiday: crossing streets as the light fades, eating unsafe treats and bringing home a bag of sugar-laden goodies.

**Hungry Ghosts**

Start with the menu for your party, choosing healthy foods that your kids and their guests will enjoy.

“Pair fun and healthy together, and don’t forget fruits and vegetables. Dips are an easy way to entice kids to eat healthy snacks, such as celery, carrots or apples,” says Shelly Summar, Weight Management Coordinator at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics. “Parents should select recipes that their children can help prepare, increasing the fun and acceptability of the food choices.”

Presentation is one way to make simple party fare ghoulishly good fun. For example, make Monster Paws by filling clear plastic gloves with bright candy at the tips of each finger and filling the rest with low-fat popcorn. Secure the opening and presto—a fun and festive treat your children can help make.

For more eerily helpful tips and recipes for a safe Halloween, go to www.childrensmercy.org/halloweensafety. Under the “Video” section, click to watch our registered dietitian demonstrate how to prepare fun, healthy treats for your Halloween party.
Healthy Homes, Healthier Lives

Your home is a place that surrounds your child with love and support, but it also should be a place where your child’s health is allowed to thrive. An environmental health assessment, available through Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, can be a valuable tool in providing your family with a safe, happy home.

Respiratory illnesses in children are more common than you might think, and keeping a clean, healthy home environment is one of the best ways to keep children healthy. According to the American Lung Association, almost 7 million American children are living with childhood asthma and more than half of them have had at least one asthma attack since the diagnosis.

“Our environmental home assessments are one of the most unique services we offer to families,” says Christina Ciaccio, MD, Allergy, Asthma and Immunology at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine. “Assessments are especially valuable for children with asthma and other breathing conditions because poor air quality inside the home can trigger attacks.”

Overlooked Health Hazards

Kevin Kennedy, Manager of the Environmental Health Program and Environmental Hygienist for Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, says families working toward creating healthy homes often make similar common mistakes, including:

- using too many chemical-based cleaners and air fresheners
- keeping too many plants in the home
- not changing the home’s air filter frequently enough or using a low-quality air filter.

“Many people are surprised by what we find through environmental home assessments, but they are able to take our suggestions and build a healthier home,” Kennedy says. “We also offer a wide variety of community education programs. Our goal is to help every home in Kansas City become as healthy as it can be.”

Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics provides the only hospital-based environmental health assessments for families in Kansas City. For more information about this important service, visit www.childrensmercy.org or call (816) 235-6331.

Educating the Community

Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics offers families, educators and community members the opportunity to learn more about keeping indoor environments healthy through a variety of classes and programs. These include:

- Healthy Home Courses
- Healthy Home for Asthma Night

To learn more about these educational opportunities or to arrange for a Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics expert to speak at your church, school or neighborhood organization, call (816) 235-6331.

Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics wants to make every Kansas City home safe for children. To make that dream a reality, grants are available to help lower income families in need of an environmental health assessment.
Cyber Safety for Kids: A Parent’s Primer

With the rise of phenomena such as social networking sites, cyberbullying and sexting, parents must foster open communication with their kids to keep them safe in cyberspace.

It’s an undeniable fact that the Internet has revolutionized childhood. From the classroom to the living room, kids today are more wired and technologically savvy than parents two decades ago could have dreamed. Instant access to information—about the world and each other—can be a definite benefit for kids, but it’s not without risks.

It can be daunting for parents whose techno-knowledge lags behind that of their kids to understand the relationship young people have with technology. That’s why parent-child communication is important.

“I think the rapid development of technology has made our society struggle to keep pace with making arrangements for handling online safety issues,” says Christy Kleinsorge, PhD, Clinical Psychologist at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine. “The bottom line is that parents must communicate with their kids, avoid overreacting to what their kids tell them and make time to set rules for Internet access.”

Technology such as cell phones and the Internet harbor many potential pitfalls, but three of the biggest concerns for parents are social networking sites, cyberbullying and sexting.

Social Scene

Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace are not inherently risky—they can be a great way for kids to connect with one another and maintain friendships, and most young people use them for that purpose. The sites become a thorny issue, however, when kids reveal too much about themselves on their profiles.

“Constructive things, such as thoughts and feelings, are perfectly acceptable to share on social networking sites,” says Daryl A. Lynch, MD, Section Chief, Adolescent Medicine at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC.
School of Medicine. “Kids must be very careful about posting photographs, however, because something as benign as a picture of a pet is a unique identifier that could let someone know where they live.”

Make sure your children know that certain information—such as addresses, Social Security numbers, phone numbers, school names, birth dates and identifying or inappropriate photographs—is off-limits for online posting. In addition, encourage your kids to restrict access to their profiles to a select group of friends. If your child is “friends” on a social networking site with a trusted adult—such as a coach or parent of a friend—that individual may be able to alert you to potential missteps by your child. Such an arrangement with another adult, however, should be made clear to your child to maintain trust.

**Keyboard Bullies**

One negative consequence of online connectivity among kids is that bullies can now hide behind screen names rather than tough exteriors. Cyberbullying occurs when a child subjects a peer to threats, humiliation or harassment online, a situation that can become serious if not handled appropriately—the 2006 suicide of a teenage girl in Missouri prompted state lawmakers to expand harassment laws to include cyberbullying in 2008.

“There’s a perception of anonymity on the Internet which may embolden bullies,” says Dr. Lynch. “Parents should make kids understand, however, that someone who makes them feel uncomfortable online is no different than someone pushing or shoving them in person.”

Incidents of cyberbullying—which can be committed directly by one individual or by proxy via accomplices—should be reported immediately to parents, school guidance counselors or other officials. Keep all electronic correspondence as evidence. It’s essential for victims of cyberbullying to receive plenty of love and support from their parents, so any incident should be taken seriously.

**Incriminating Images**

Sexting—the phenomenon of middle school or high school age kids sending explicit images of themselves to one another via cell phone—is a growing problem that can have serious emotional and legal consequences. Approximately 20 percent of teens who responded to a nationwide survey by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy admitted to sexting. Inappropriate images can ruin a child’s reputation, not to mention result in legal trouble for producing or distributing such images.

“Teens and pre-teens often don’t understand the potential ramifications of sexting,” says Dr. Kleinsorge. “An image they think will stay private can be distributed in no time with damaging effects.”

The most important tool in preventing sexting is letting your kids know where you stand on the issue. Discuss the consequences of sexting with your kids frankly and listen to their views. Rules about cell phone access and availability vary with each family’s situation—the devices are great for kids to have in case of emergency once they begin spending more time away from parents. However, if you’re concerned about sexting, consider purchasing a non-camera phone for your child or limiting his or her text messaging capabilities.

**For more tips on how to keep your child safe in cyberspace, visit www.childrensmercy.org/childhoodsafety, then click “Safety on the Net.”**
Put Fire Safety First This Fall

Saving you and your loved ones from a fire could be as simple as remembering to change the batteries in your smoke detector.

“When you set your clocks for Daylight Savings Time, change the batteries in your smoke detector,” says John Cowden, MD, General Pediatrics at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine. “Another easy way to remember the switch is to update your smoke detector the first time you turn on your heater in the fall or your air-conditioner in the spring.”

In addition to keeping your smoke detector in good working order, make sure detectors are placed throughout the home, especially near the kitchen and bedrooms.

Be Prepared

In the event there is a fire, you and your loved ones need to know how to exit your house safely.

“Fire safety plans are critical for all families,” says Dr. Cowden. “Because more fire-related deaths occur at night when people are sleeping, everyone needs to know how to get out of their sleeping area and where to meet up once they have evacuated the home.”

Prepare a fire escape plan for your family and practice it twice a year, rehearsing it during both the day and night. Also ensure that everyone knows two ways out of each room.

For more fire safety information, visit the Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org/childhoodsafety and click on “Fire Safety.”

Redefine the Holiday Spirit

In times of economic woe, parents may stress over the holidays. Instead of worrying about what you can’t provide, take this opportunity to foster attitudes of gratitude in your children.

An economic downturn can open the door for parents to teach their children about meaningful holiday activities rather than focusing on the material aspects of an expensive Halloween costume or a big Thanksgiving dinner. While it may be a good idea to discuss financial concerns with older children, it’s also an opportunity to foster learning moments and positive parenting time.

“Children should learn early on that they don’t need the most expensive items or foods they want,” says David Bennett, PhD, Clinical Psychologist at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Psychology at the UMKC School of Medicine. “Smaller kids are often more interested in the time they may spend making a costume with their mom or dad than how spiffy or complex it is.”

Cutting Holiday Costs

While you can use the holidays as a great way to teach your kids valuable lessons, it’s also a great time to find innovative ways of helping your pocketbook survive the season.

• Consider trading Halloween costumes between family, friends or co-workers rather than buying new costumes.
• Get crafty and make holiday decorations with your child.
• Suggest a potluck Thanksgiving dinner with family members.

Visit www.childrensmercy.org/parentingsupport for more tips on how to handle the tough economy.
Colic is a condition that includes excessive crying, irritability and fussiness in an otherwise healthy baby. Colic can cause stress for both babies and parents alike, and though there is no cure, the condition eventually goes away on its own. If you have a colicky baby, one or more of the following methods may help you comfort your baby and save your sanity.

- Lay your baby on her stomach, and gently massage her back.
- Play music or place your baby in a room with low, soothing sounds to block out loud noises.
- Swaddle your baby and place him in a dark room.
- Take your baby for a car ride.
- Rock your baby or walk around with her.

For more tips on coping with colic, visit www.childrensmercy.org and search for “colic.”

Can You Hear That?

Loud noises can have damaging effects on hearing, and some children’s toys have been known to emit noises exceeding safe levels. A child’s hearing is more sensitive than an adult’s, which makes it important to monitor the noise levels your child is exposed to.

Sounds that are around 70 decibels, such as a running dishwasher, are considered to be safe. However, sounds that are 85 decibels or more, such as a lawnmower or hair dryer, can cause long-term damage to hearing.

Some toys with sirens or horns, electronic toys or cap guns are too loud for children’s sensitive ears. To help protect your child from hearing loss, consider the following tips:
- Purchase toys with volume controls.
- Try toys out in the store to test volume.
- Put tape over speakers to muffle sound, or remove the batteries.

In Case of an Emergency

When faced with an accident, being prepared is key. To ensure the health and safety of your child, create and maintain an accurate and accessible emergency contact list.

Some useful emergency contacts include:
- Children’s Mercy Hospital Emergency Department: (816) 234-3430
- Children’s Mercy South Urgent Care Center: (913) 696-8274
- Children’s Mercy Northland Urgent Care Center: (816) 413-2526
- Poison Control Center: (800) 222-1222
- Contact information for key relatives and neighbors.

After creating your list, keep a copy in your wallet, and place a copy in a noticeable spot, preferably near a phone. A babysitter or other caregiver should be able to locate the list quickly and easily if needed.

For a printable version of this list, visit www.childrensmercy.org/homesafehome.
A Million Reasons to Trust.

Colton and Carter’s family chose Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics because we offer the highest level of neonatal intensive care in the region. Two years after treating Colton for a perinatal stroke, we provided the same great care for his brother Carter when he was born 12 weeks prematurely.

There are a million reasons to choose Children’s Mercy.

What’s yours?

“We didn’t skip a beat when asked which hospital we wanted him transported to.”

– Bobbie C.