


# HIDDEN HAZARDS NUMBER TWO

THE COALITION FOR CONSUMER HEALTH AND SAFETY, A PARTNERSHIP OF NATIONAL CONSUMER, HEALTH, AND INSURER GROUPS, WANTS YOU TO BE AWARE OF SOME EVERYDAY THREATS TO HEALTH AND SAFETY AND THE PRECAUTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY FROM THESE HAZARDS.


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## Unsafe Installation of Child Safety Seats in Motor Vehicles

**HAZARD:**  A child secured in a child safety seat may still be injured or killed in a crash if the car seat has not been installed properly. One of the most common installation errors is failure to use a special locking clip when it is required for your vehicle.


**Precaution:** Follow all child seat installation instructions in both the vehicle owner's manual and the child seat directions. Read the safety belt information in your vehicle manual to find out if you need to install the locking clip that comes with each child seat. If the clip is needed, follow the child seat instructions for attaching it to the car's safety belt. If the clip is missing, call the seat's manufacturer to order one. For more information on child seats, call 202/884-4993, the National SAFE KIDS Campaign. For seat recall information, find the make and model number usually listed on the back of the child seat, and call the Auto Safety Hotline of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1-800/424-9393.

## Guns in the Home

**HAZARD:**  Approximately 230 children aged 14 and under die from unintentional shootings each year. Many more, an estimated 3,600 children, were hospitalized and an additional 15,000 received medical treatment for unintentional gun injuries in 1992. Guns are used in approximately 60% of all teenage suicides. Suicide is 4.8 times more likely to occur and a homicide 2.7 times more likely to be committed when there is a gun in the home. In fact a gun in the home is 43 times more likely to kill a family member or a friend than it is to kill an intruder in self-defense. In a recent National SAFE KIDS Campaign survey, 59% of parents who have guns in their homes admitted that their guns are not locked away from their children.

**Precaution:** If you keep guns in the home, lock them up and store ammunition in a separate locked area. Teach children never to touch a gun and to tell an adult if they find a gun. Also check to see if your child is playing in a home where guns are present.

## Alcohol and Medications

**HAZARD:**  Alcohol interacts with many common medications leading to increased risk of illness, injury or death. Even small amounts of alcohol may have adverse effects when combined with prescription and over-the-counter medicines such as: antibiotics, antidepressants, pain relievers, anesthetics, antihistamines, antiulcer drugs, heart pills, sleep aids and anticoagulants. Alcohol may reduce the effectiveness of medicines or make some more toxic. Some medicines may increase blood alcohol levels or alcohol's adverse effect on the brain. Chronic drinkers may experience these negative effects even when they have not recently had a drink. The elderly, who may take more medications than others, should be aware that the effects of mixing alcohol and medication tend to be more severe with advancing age.

**Precaution:** Avoid alcohol while taking medication, even over-the-counter medicines such as aspirin and acetaminophen. Heavy drinkers, the elderly and those with chronic illnesses should be particularly cautious and discuss the potential dangers with a doctor or pharmacist. For more information call the National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information (1-800/729-6686).

## Falls and the Elderly

**HAZARD:** Falls are the leading cause of unintentional death in the home — 7,000 deaths each year. Injuries associated with stairs, steps, rugs or floors account for nearly 2 million hospital emergency visits per year — many due to falls. Rugs and runners account for 6,800 hospital-treated injuries to people 65 and older. Wet, soapy tile or porcelain surfaces in the bath are especially slippery and dangerous. Standing on chairs, boxes and other makeshift items to reach high shelves also results in falls. When older people fall, they are more likely to sustain serious injuries that often lead to death.

**Precaution:** Retrofit staircase areas with light switches at the top and bottom, and handrails on both sides. Improve tread to prevent slips and falls on stairs and steps. Remove all objects from stairways to prevent tripping, particularly in an emergency or fire. Apply double-faced adhesive carpet tape or rubber matting to the backs of rugs. Grab bars, textured strips and non-skid mats all can help reduce falls in the tub and shower. Use a step stool with a handrail to reach high shelves. Install a night light. For a copy of *Safety for Older Consumers: Home Safety Checklist* from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, call 1-800/638-CPSC.

## Low or Non-Fat Desserts

**HAZARD:** Although low-fat desserts are lower in fat than cakes, cookies and frozen desserts lacking a “low-fat” label, they are not always lower in calories. Many are tempted to eat extra servings — which add up to extra calories — under the mistaken impression that “non fat” means “not fattening.” Unfortunately, this misconception contributes to the increasing numbers of Americans who are overweight — and therefore at greater risk of heart attack, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes and cancer.

**Precaution:** Check the serving size and calories as well as fat content listed on the label for desserts and other foods you buy. For more information call the American Heart Association at 1-800/AHA-USA1.

## Chewing Tobacco and Snuff

**HAZARD:** One of the most harmful of all the tobacco products is smokeless tobacco. Many are unaware that smokeless tobacco continues to be a leading cause of oral cancer, gum disease, tooth loss and nicotine addiction. There are 12 million smokeless tobacco users in the United States — 3 million under the age of 21. Smokeless tobacco use by teenagers 16-19 years old has increased 10 fold in the last 15 years. In 1991 20% of high school boys were users. During that same year 30,000 new cases of oral and throat cancers were diagnosed.

**Precaution:** Ten (10) is the average age children first use smokeless tobacco. Teach children at a young age that any kind of tobacco is extremely dangerous and that chewing tobacco is not a “safe alternative” to smoking. For more information send a stamped self-addressed envelope to *Spit Tobacco*, American Academy of Otolaryngology, 1 Prince St., Alexandria, VA 22314.

## New Strains of HIV Increase AIDS Risk

**HAZARD:** Researchers at the Harvard AIDS Institute have warned that at least 4 highly infectious strains of HIV are now on their way to the U.S. and may have already arrived. These new strains are much more easily transmitted through heterosexual sex than were prior strains of the HIV virus. Remember, people can have HIV or AIDS yet feel and look perfectly healthy. Moreover, it takes only one unprotected sex act to become HIV infected! Unless someone has been in a long-term monogamous relationship with an uninfected person, unprotected sex is like playing Russian roulette.

**Precaution:** For those who are sexually active, effective protection against HIV is provided by a good quality latex condom used with a water-based lubricant. No other means of contraception, except abstinence, protects against HIV or any other sexually transmitted disease. For more information call the National AIDS Hotline, 1-800/342-2437 (English) or 1-800/344-7432 (Spanish); or write, *How to Talk About AIDS*, P.O. Box 303, Hartford, CT 06141.

## Carbon Monoxide

**HAZARD:** Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, toxic gas that kills approximately 300 Americans each year. It is produced by the incomplete combustion of solid, liquid and gaseous fuels. Heating appliances fueled with gas, oil, kerosene or wood may produce CO. If such appliances are not installed, maintained and used properly, CO may accumulate to dangerous levels. Cars, motorcycles and lawnmowers also produce CO. Blocked chimneys and flues also can cause buildup of CO in the home, as can use of a charcoal grill or hibachi in the house or in a car, RV or camper.

**Precaution:** Know the signs of CO poisoning: dizziness, fatigue, headache, confusion, nausea, irregular breathing or vomiting. Never keep a car, motorcycle or lawnmower running in a closed or attached garage. Have a qualified service technician check your home's central and room heating appliances (including water heaters and gas dryers). Open doors and windows when using unvented kerosene and gas space heaters. Have your chimney and flue checked for blockages. Never use a range or oven to heat a room. Install a CO detector. For more CO tips send a self-addressed stamped envelope to, *CO Check*, CFA, P.O. Box 12099, Washington, DC 20005-0999.

## Used Cribs

**HAZARD:** Some used cribs pose a threat to your baby.



Every year, about 50 babies suffocate or strangle when trapped between broken crib parts or in cribs with older, unsafe designs.

**Precaution:** Some typical used crib hazards include: missing, loose or broken screws and other crib parts; crib slat spacing more than 2-3/8"; corner posts higher than the end panels; easily dislodged mattress supports; and peeling paint. For complete crib safety information write, *Is Your Crib Safe?*, The Danny Foundation, 3158 Danville Blvd., P.O. Box 680, Alamo, CA 94507 or call 1-800/833-2669. When purchasing a new crib, be sure it has been certified to meet national safety standards by an independent laboratory.

## Drinking Water and Cryptosporidium

**HAZARD:** A tiny parasite called cryptosporidium (crypto), commonly found in lakes and rivers, makes drinking tap water treated according to current standards unsafe for people with severely weakened immune systems. Crypto is able to pass through water treatment filtration and resists chlorine that kills other germs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that up to 6 million vulnerable Americans (cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy, transplant patients taking immunosuppressive drugs, and people with HIV/AIDS) are at risk of serious illness or death from crypto infections. In 1993 some 400,000 people contracted crypto and over 100 died in the Milwaukee outbreak.

**Precaution:** The CDC recommends that people with severely suppressed immune systems consult their health-care providers about whether their drinking water should be boiled (1 minute), filtered (Absolute 1 micron), or bottled. Not all bottled water is safe. An inexpensive and safe water is sold in jugs labeled "distilled." For more information ask for *Drinking Water & AIDS* at the National Association of People with AIDS: 202/898-0414 or write them at 1413 K St., NW, 7th fl., Washington, DC 20005; or call the EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline, 1-800/426-4791.

National consumer, health, and insurer groups work together in the COALITION FOR CONSUMER HEALTH AND SAFETY, not only to educate the public, but also to identify and promote federal policy solutions to health and safety threats in seven areas — motor vehicle safety, home and product safety, indoor air quality, food safety and nutrition, tobacco use, alcohol consumption, and AIDS. For more information about the Coalition or bulk copies of this brochure, write: *Hidden Hazards*, the Coalition for Consumer Health and Safety, P.O. Box 12099, Washington, DC 20005-0999. For a single free copy of this brochure, send a stamped self-addressed envelope to the same address.

## MEMBERS OF THE COALITION FOR CONSUMER HEALTH AND SAFETY

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