

Fire safety in the home

Follow these simple, inexpensive tips to prevent fires in your home. You can also get free advice from your local fire and rescue service so if a fire does break out, you and others can get out quickly and safely.

Request a free home safety visit from the NIFRS

The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) offers a free home fire safety visit. It will inspect your home to help you spot any potential fire hazards and show you what to do to reduce or prevent the risk of fire. It can also advise you on an escape plan if there is a fire.

- [Request a free home fire safety check](#)(external link opens in a new window / tab)

Fit a smoke alarm and test it regularly

- fit smoke alarms on each level of your home – it's the simplest step you can take to cut the risk of dying as a result of a fire in your home
- test the batteries in your smoke alarm every week and change them every year -never remove them apart from when replacing them
- [Smoke alarms and fire emergency equipment](#)

Plan an escape route and make a bedtime check

Plan a route to escape your home if there is a fire and make sure everyone in the house knows the plan. If there's a fire, don't tackle it yourself – get out, stay out and call 999.

Check for fire hazards in your home before you go to bed - it takes longer to become aware of a fire when asleep. See [Planning an escape](#) for more information about bedtime checks and making an escape plan.

Don't overload sockets

Try to keep to one plug per socket - too many electrical appliances plugged into one socket can overload it, which can lead to overheating. Electrical appliances, plugs and cables that are old or poorly wired can also be a real danger.

- [Electrical safety](#)

Smoking safety

More people die in fires caused by smoking than in fires caused by anything else. Tobacco is manufactured to stay alight, meaning it can stay smouldering and start a fire. Always stub cigarettes out properly and dispose of them carefully.

Follow these safety tips if you smoke:

- never smoke in bed - it's very easy to fall asleep and allow your cigarette to set light to your bedclothes or furnishings
- don't smoke if you're drowsy - especially if you're sitting in a comfortable chair or if you've been drinking or taking prescription drugs; again, it's easy to fall asleep
- don't leave a lit cigarette, cigar or pipe – they can easily overbalance and land on the carpet or other flammable material; and make sure your ashtray is heavy and can't tip easily
- make totally sure that your butts (and any remains in your pipe bowl) aren't still smouldering when you've finished with them; wet them and empty your ashtray into a metal bin outside the house
- keep lighters, matches and smoking materials out of the reach of children – you can also buy child-resistant lighters and containers for matches

Kitchen safety

More than half of accidental fires at home are started by cooking. Take extra care when cooking with hot oil and don't leave children alone in the kitchen when the hob or oven is on.

How to cook safely

Make sure you don't get distracted when you are cooking and:

- take pans off the heat or turn the heat down if you're called away from the cooker, for example by a phone call
- take care if you're wearing loose clothing as it can catch fire easily
- don't cook if you have been drinking alcohol or taken prescription drugs - you may get drowsy or lose concentration

Cooker and toaster safety

- turn saucepans so the handles don't stick out over the edge of the hob or over another ring
- double check that the cooker is off when you have finished cooking
- make sure tea-towels aren't hanging over the cooker and don't put oven gloves on top of a hot cooker
- keep the oven, hob and grill clean - built-up fat and bits of food can start a fire

- check that the toaster is clean and well away from curtains and empty the crumb tray regularly

Cooking with oil

You need to be especially careful when deep-fat frying or cooking with oil because hot oil can catch fire easily. Make sure you:

- don't fill a chip pan or other deep-fat fryer more than one-third full of oil
- use a thermostat-controlled deep-fat fryer, which will make sure the fat doesn't get too hot

The microwave

Don't put anything in the microwave that is made of metal or has a metallic finish or parts, and don't dry clothes in the microwave.

Dealing with a fire in your kitchen

If a pan catches fire in your kitchen:

- don't move it because it will be very hot
- turn off the heat if it's safe to do so - don't lean over the pan to reach the controls
- don't use a fire extinguisher on a pan of oil because the force of the extinguisher can spread the fire
- never use water on chip pan fires as this will cause a fireball - use a fire blanket to smother the flames if it safe to do so
- get out, stay out and call 999

If an electrical appliance catches fire, don't throw water on it. If it is safe to do so, you may be able to put out the fire immediately by:

- pulling the appliance's plug out
- switching off the power at the fuse box

If the fire doesn't go out, get out of the house, stay out and call 999.

See [Electrical safety](#) for more information about preventing electrical fires.

Fire safety equipment for the kitchen

Consider keeping a fire blanket in the kitchen, mounted on the wall, where you can get to it easily and quickly. Fire blankets can be used to put out a fire or wrap a person whose clothes are on fire.

In the kitchen, a heat detector is more suitable than a smoke detector. If you do opt for a smoke alarm though, don't fit it where it could be set off by cooking fumes or steam. If you find your smoke alarm goes off a lot accidentally, you can buy one that is fitted with a 'hush' button. This means

you can silence it instantly so you're not tempted to remove the battery (except to change it for a new one).

- [Smoke alarms and fire emergency equipment](#)

Ventilation equipment in the kitchen

Check regularly that the ventilation in your kitchen, like range hoods or fans, is working properly and is not blocked up. This is especially important if you have a gas cooker in case any leaking gas builds up.

- [Gas safety and carbon monoxide](#)

Candles, decorative lights and decorations

Candles

Keep these safety tips in mind whenever you use candles at home:

- always place candles in a purpose-made candle holder
- always put them on a heat-resistant surface and be especially careful with night lights and tea lights, which get hot enough to melt plastic; TVs are not fire-resistant
- make sure they are held firmly upright by the holder so they won't fall over - the holder needs to be stable too so it won't fall over either
- don't put candles near curtains, or other fabrics or furniture - and keep them out of draughts
- don't put them under shelves - make sure there's at least one metre (three feet) between a candle and any surface above it
- keep clothes and hair away from the naked flame - if there's any chance you could forget a candle is there and lean across or brush past it, put it somewhere else
- candles should always be placed out of the reach of children and away from areas that pets can get into
- leave at least four inches (10 cm) between two candles
- extinguish candles before moving them and don't let anything fall into the hot wax, like matchsticks
- don't leave them burning - you should extinguish candles before you leave a room; never go to sleep with a candle still burning and never leave a burning candle or oil burner in a child's bedroom
- use a snuffer or a spoon to put them out - blowing them can send sparks and hot wax flying - and double-check that they're completely out and not still smouldering

Decorative lights

Fairy lights and Christmas tree lights don't get used very often so you should make sure they're in good working order before using them:

- check that the fuse in the plug is the right size - see the box for the maximum size of fuse you should use
- replace bulbs that blow
- don't leave lights on when you go to bed or leave the house
- don't let the bulbs touch anything that can burn easily, such as paper or fabrics - be especially careful with other Christmas tree decorations

Decorations

Festive decorations made of tissue paper or cardboard burn particularly easily, so keep decorations and greeting cards away from heaters, lights, fireplaces and candles.

Candles and nightlights are often used in celebrations for Christmas and other festivals. They should never be put in or by a Christmas tree, plants, flowers or other foliage. You should also be careful that ribbons and other decorations aren't near any candle flames.

Fire safety during celebrations and holidays

As well as the everyday care you should take in your home, you should take extra precautions if you are hosting a party, or if you have friends or family staying in your home, for example:

- if you have guests staying the night, make sure they know how to escape safely
- let guests know of any features they may not be familiar with, such as how to unlock your front door
- tell guests where the door keys are kept overnight
- take particular care of elderly people, children and those with disabilities
- if there are smokers, put out enough ashtrays so ash and butts don't get dropped in places like wastepaper bins