

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

University of Georgia Family & Consumer Sciences • Volume 4 • Number 1 • March 2020



Georgia Healthy Housing
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Neighborhood Bear Hunt!

Looking for a fun way to keep children entertained while practicing social distancing? Invite your neighborhood to set up a virtual bear hunt. Ask each family to place a stuffed bear in a window where others can see it. When you go on a neighborhood walk, encourage children to look for bears in the windows of the houses they pass.



Image Source:
Pixabay

Keeping Children Safe and Healthy During COVID-19

Written by Diane Bales, FACS Extension Human Development Specialist

The global COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest worldwide concern right now. Schools and child care programs are closed, families are sheltering at home, and stores are facing shortages of toilet paper and other items. In the midst of so much confusion and anxiety, how can you help keep children safe and healthy? Here are a few tips:

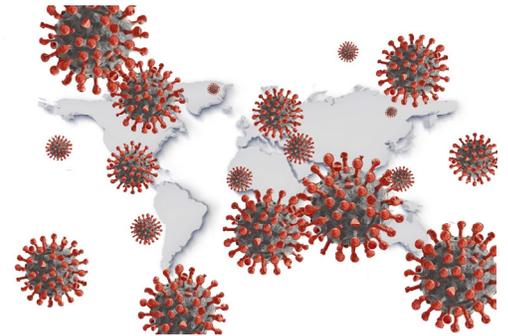


Image Source: Pixabay

- **Create a routine.** Routines help children feel secure. Get up at the same time each morning, and plan times for eating and play and rest. For children old enough for online schoolwork, help them set up a space and times to do that work. Break up worktime with active play.
- **Eat healthy and get enough rest.** Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, drinking water, and getting enough sleep all help boost the immune system.
- **Play outside together.** This is not a good time for play dates, because children may share germs. Instead, your family can play together in the yard or go for a walk or bicycle ride together. Physical activity allows children to release energy and strengthen their heart and lungs.
- **Encourage regular, careful handwashing.** Teach children how to scrub their hands for at least 20 seconds. Singing "Happy Birthday" through twice is a good way to ensure that you are washing long enough.
- **Explain social distancing.** Most children are not used to staying home, except when they are sick. Help them understand why staying away from other people is important. Explain that staying at home helps keep people from catching the virus. Be sure to tell them that they will be able to go back to regular activities when the emergency is over.
- **Monitor media use.** Children do not have the thinking skills to understand news reports about the pandemic, and may be frightened by news coverage. Choose specific times and sources, and watch together so you can answer questions and reassure your child.
- **Find ways to help (remotely).** Write letters to people who are isolated. Draw pictures and hang them in your windows. Drop off food on a neighbor's porch (as long as nobody in the family is sick). Connect with family and friends by phone, text, or video call.

The COVID-19 outbreak is stressful and scary for everyone. But with help and reassurance, your children can thrive through this emergency.

Soap and Detergent FACTS

Written by Ines Beltran, FACS Extension Agent, Gwinnett County

We all use soap and detergent, but do you know the difference? How do you decide which one to use? Soap has a long history. The ancient Babylonians first made soap around 2800 B.C. The ancient Egyptians mixed animal and vegetable oils with alkaline salts to produce a soap-like substance in 1550 BC. Later, in the first Century A.D., early Romans made soap from urine, which was widely known throughout the Roman Empire. In Medieval Europe, soap was considered a luxury item, and it wasn't until the late 18th century that soap became available in the U.S.

Detergent is much newer than soap. Due to soap ingredient shortages during WWI, manufacturers developed detergents in 1916. Today, detergents are easily available for most American. We use detergents for laundering, dishwashing and many other types of cleaning.

Ingredients in Soap and Detergent

Soap is made from natural ingredients such plant oils (vegetable oils) or acids derived from animal fat. Detergents are synthetic man-made substances formulated for many types of cleaning purposes. Detergents are so versatile due to their surface-active agents, known as surfactants. Surfactants have a positive or negative charge that attracts water, dirt, and grease. Surfactants break up these substances to be washed away. They also promote cleaning by reducing surface tension, allowing for improved water penetration.

Soap and Detergent in Water

- **Residue:** Detergents are free-rinsing, meaning they don't leave a residue. Soap reacts with water and needs a clear water wash after application or it will leave a film.
- **Reaction with water:** Soap forms a scum when used in hard water conditions (i. e., in water that contains dissolved calcium and magnesium compounds). Soap scum reduces cleanliness, can deteriorate fabrics, and eventually ruins clothing or other surfaces. Hard water also limits soap's cleaning capabilities. Detergents work better in hard water because they react less to the many minerals.
- **Water temperature:** Soaps need warm water to work well. Detergents are effective in any temperature. Detergents can be used in everything from shampoo to laundry detergent to hand cleansers and stain removers. They can be formulated as acidic, alkaline or pH neutral, and ingredients such as enzymes can be added to aid in these specific applications.

Environmental Impact of Soap and Detergent

Commercial soap production requires expensive natural resources, extra water for rinsing, and uses more energy to heat the wash water. Detergents contain many organic compounds, including carcinogens such as acetaldehyde and benzene, which are used to scent some popular brands of laundry detergent. These compounds decrease indoor air quality and contribute to air and water pollution, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

To help to protect the environment, choose environmentally-friendly detergents. Read labels carefully, and look for products bearing the EPA Design for the Environment seal. Detergents with this seal are free of inorganic phosphates and contain only surfactants that minimize environmental pollution when they go into solution. Also, to avoid respiratory asthma problems, look for laundry detergents that are fragrance-free or scented without the use of petroleum by-products.

Remember, health and cleanliness are important for individuals and society.



Image Source: U. S. Environmental Protection Agency



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Is Your Local Playground Safe?

Written by Diane Bales, FACS Extension Human Development Specialist

As springtime rolls around, you may be spending more time outdoors with your children. For many families, a nearby playground may be a favorite destination for active play. But before you let your child run and climb and jump, it's important to know that the playground is safe. Playgrounds are a common site of unintentional injuries, many of which are related to the equipment or design.

As you look around the playground, here are the most important things to check:

- Is the playground enclosed with a fence or other barrier? If not, is it far enough from traffic and other dangers so you could stop your child before he gets hurt?
- Is the playground equipment in good condition? Watch out for rust, splinters, chipping paint, loose boards, and openings wide enough for a child's head to get trapped.
- Is the playground equipment securely anchored? Grab the posts and shake to see if they move. Safe equipment should not move or shift around when children climb on it.
- Are there appropriate fall zones? All equipment must be at least 6 feet from fences, walls, shrubs, and other playground equipment to provide a safe space if a child falls. Swings should be at least twice the length of the chains away from fences and other equipment – so if the chains are 8 feet long, the swings should have at least 16 feet of open space in front and behind.

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What's in Grandma's Purse?

Written by Becca Stackhouse, FACS Extension Agent, Crisp County

Take a moment and name five items you could pull out of grandma's purse. What came to mind? You might imagine a notebook, pen, calendar, snack foods, medications, a hairbrush, candy, a wallet, money, lipstick, hair pins or ties, loose change, a necklace, earrings, rings, and hand sanitizer. The problem is that many of these items can be poisonous or dangerous to children.

You may not immediately see the dangers in grandma's purse. But when that purse is left sitting on the floor or in a chair, young children have access to items that may harm them. Did it ever cross your mind that you may carry around items that are unsafe for young children? Children may mistake a bottle of colorful pills for candy or a laxative for a chocolate bar. Many medications can be dangerous to children even in small amounts. Small objects like hair pins and coins can be a choking hazard for small children. And you may be surprised how quickly a curious child can remove these items from a purse or bag while your back is turned.

Parents and caregivers of young children must be vigilant when you have company. Remember that your guests might not think about grandma's purse being a problem. Preventing accidents starts with being aware that everyday items can be dangerous to a child exploring the environment.



Image Source: pixabay.com



Is Your Local Playground Safe? (continued)

- Is the ground surfacing soft? Mulch, wood chips, rubber mats, and sand are appropriate materials under playground equipment because they are soft enough to reduce the impact of a child's fall. Sand, mulch, or wood chips should be at least 6-12 inches deep to provide enough cushion. Hard dirt, grass, and concrete surfaces are not safe surfaces under playground equipment.
- Is shade available? Look for playground that have covered areas where children and adults can be in shade. These areas may be under a section of the play structure, under trees, or under a canopy or other cover. Having shady areas reduces the risk of overheating and helps you avoid sunburn.



Image Source: Pixabay

Playgrounds can be a great place to encourage (or join) your child in physical activity, as long as they are safe. Choose playground that meet all of these criteria to reduce the risk of injuries.

Helpful Hints for the Playground

- The sun can heat up surfaces quickly, including playground equipment. Teach your child to touch equipment before climbing on it or sliding down it, to make sure it is not too hot.
- Don't boost your child up! If you lift your child onto high equipment that she can't reach herself, she is at greater risk of falling and hurting herself because she may not realize her limits. Instead, coach your child by telling her where to place a foot or hand, and encourage her as she tries to do it herself.

Healthy Home Hacks

Odors in your home can be removed by setting out bowls of white vinegar or cat litter with activated charcoal around your home. Place where the odor is the strongest and change regularly until the smell is gone.
~ Pamela Turner

Upcycle a paper towel tube by cutting it in half and using it to hold cords from hair care tools.
~ Pamela Turner



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This newsletter is produced by UGA Extension and supported in part by the U.S Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes under the Healthy Homes Partnership Grant.

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