

Health Mart Pharmacist Column—2006

Bathroom Safety

June 2006



You may think of it as your hygiene haven, but your bathroom has the potential to be an accident trap, especially for the younger or older members of your family. A few of the leading causes of fatal injuries in homes are falls, poisonings, and drownings. The bathroom is often the scene of the “crime.” With a few simple precautions, however, you can greatly reduce the risks.

Although a soapy tub or wet floor can pose a slip-and-trip hazard for anyone, seniors are at greatest risk. Among people age 65 and older, falls are the leading cause of death from injury. The risk is six times greater for people older than 75. Here’s where you can start to lower those risks: Replace loose throw rugs with nonslip bath mats, and bar soap with a liquid soap dispenser. Refrain from waxing floors, and make sure to clean up water spills right away. Install grab bars in tubs and showers and near toilets. It might be worth having a professional do this for you. A bathtub bench or shower chair and raised toilet seat can greatly help people in your family with mobility problems. Finally, use nightlights to reduce the risk of falls during those inevitable middle-of-the night bathroom visits.

Six thousand people die and 300,000 suffer serious illnesses from accidental poisonings each year. Yet, according to the State of Home Safety in America, 82 percent of families don’t secure their medications. One of the best precautions you can take is to keep medication lids tightly closed at all times and to store medications in a lockable cabinet. Be sure to also add the following to a locked cabinet: mouthwashes, nail polish and remover, hair dye and sprays, cosmetics, and cleansers, as well as sharp objects such as razor blades and nail scissors. Remember: many children are climbers and can reach a high medicine cabinet in an instant, using the toilet and sink as their “stepping stones.”

According to the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, hot water scald burns cause more deaths and hospitalizations than any other burns from hot liquids. Hair curlers, curling irons, and space heaters are other common causes of burns. Take heart. You can help prevent these kinds of accidents. First, set your water thermostat to 120 degrees F or below. Before bathing a baby, test the water temperature with your wrist or elbow. Consider buying a faucet cover to pad a hot faucet and install childproof knobs to prevent young children from turning on water in a tub or sink.

To prevent other accidents in the bathroom, keep electrical appliances, such as hair dryers, away from water and stored up high when not in use. Keep space heaters out of the bathroom. Make sure your

bathrooms are protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). These ground an appliance if it comes into contact with water. Also cap your electrical outlets with childproof safety covers. Finally, never ever leave a small child alone in a bathtub—not even to answer the phone or door.

At my Health Mart pharmacy, we can help you make your bathroom safer for every member of your family. Look for a selection of quality, cost-effective Sunmark home safety products. If you can't find what you need, come talk to me and we can order it for you.



If you have any questions please feel free to contact me @ 873-3244 or mcglynnrx@tds.net

Thanks,
Dan McGlynn