



# Maine Farm Safety Program

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## *Kids on the Farm: Hazards Inside the Home*

**T**he farm can be a dangerous place for children because they live in a workplace. It is difficult for children to separate their play from farm hazards. Parents must be aware of these hazards and pass this knowledge on to their children. Parents and grandparents should use precautionary safety measures to prevent accidents. They can set and enforce safe limits and be good role models for children by promoting farm safety.

### Preparing for Emergencies

Children need to know how to handle emergencies. There may be instances when a child is the only person available or able to go for help. Children need to know how to call emergency personnel. Keep emergency numbers posted near all telephones. Make sure children know their own telephone number and address.

Children need to know what to do and where to go if there is a fire. As a family, develop and practice a home fire escape plan. Explain how smoke detectors work and where to find fire extinguishers. Always keep matches away from children. Teach children to keep hot doors closed and crawl on the floor to escape. If a child's clothing is on fire, have the child "stop, drop and roll" to smother the fire. Then have the child get out and stay out.

### Kids on the Farm: Hazards Inside the Home

- **Prepare children for emergencies.**
- **Keep all poisons and medicines out of reach.**
- **Keep firearms locked up.**
- **Avoid the use of electrical appliances near water.**
- **Don't leave children unsupervised near water.**

There are as many hazards inside the home as there are on the farm. To search for potential hazards, adults need to look around the home from the view point of a child. From this vantage point, adults are able to see the hazards and begin to formulate ways to alleviate them. Begin with the kitchen and bathroom, since they are the most dangerous rooms in the home.

### **Poisons and Medicines**

Keep all poisonous chemicals and medicines out of the reach of children. This is one of the most important safety rules. Poisonous chemicals found in the home include household cleaners, insect sprays, kerosene, lighter fluid, furniture polishers, turpentine, paints, solvents, products containing lye and acids, and pet shampoos and treatments. Medicines used to treat adults or children can be deadly in an overdose. Iron pills and food supplements containing iron are very poisonous. If there is any question about a product's toxicity, read the label. The words "Danger" and "Warning" are on the most toxic chemicals.

There are ways to keep these deadly hazards out of the hands of children. Always store foods and household cleaning products separately. Make certain that foods cannot be mistaken for household cleaning products. Keep all products in their original containers. Never transfer poisonous products to

other containers, such as jars or bottles. Purchase products packaged in child-proof containers. After using these poisonous products, immediately return them to their storage area. It is a good idea to keep them locked up. Child-resistant safety latches can be put on doors and cabinets to keep little hands out of them.

Medicines should be kept out of reach of children. They should be stored in a locked area if possible. Make sure bottles have child-resistant caps. Pills in blister packs are hard for children to open. Keep liquids in small volumes in child-proof containers.

Periodically clean out the medicine cabinet. Throw away outdated medicines. Never put a medicine container with its contents in the trash. Properly dispose of old medicines by either pouring them down the drain or toilet. Rinse the container before disposing of it. It may be found later by a curious child.

Never call medicine candy. Do not deceive children, because it may backfire. When left alone, children may want candy and seek out the medicine. Always refer to medications by their proper names and explain that they must be taken in prescribed dosages. Don't take medications in front of children. They may find them and repeat what they have seen. Avoid drinking medicine from the bottle to prevent taking an incorrect dosage.



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Poisonous gases can harm children in the home. Make sure kerosene and oil-burning heaters are properly working. Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, deadly gas emitted by these heaters if they are not working correctly.

### **Miniature Button Batteries**

Miniature button batteries may cause poisoning if accidentally swallowed. The batteries can cause internal burns if they become lodged in the esophagus or intestinal tract. These tiny batteries (used in watches, calculators, cameras and hearing aids) usually pass through the person without any problem. However, if a miniature battery is swallowed, you should contact the Poison Control Center, your physician or the National Button Battery Ingestion hotline at 202-625-3333. To prevent ingestion of miniature batteries, keep them out of children's reach and throw away old batteries, securely wrapped, after they have been removed from the appliance.

### **What to Do in the Event of a Poisoning**

Accidents do happen. Children by nature will eat and drink almost anything. The best way to help your child is to know what to do. Children act fast; so do poisons.

One of the first things you should do is post your local Poison Control Center phone number near all telephones. The number for the state of Maine is 1-800-222-1222. Also post the telephone numbers for the ambulance, local or

closest hospital, and your family physician. Make family members aware of them. If a poisoning occurs, try to determine the poison taken and part of the body affected before you take action. Remember, taking the right action is as important as taking immediate action. Read the "Statement of Treatment" on the product involved in the poisoning and administer the suggested initial first aid. (See section on Poisons under First Aid.) Then contact your local Poison Control Center, physical, local emergency number (911 in many areas), ambulance if 911 is not available, or the operator.



### **Plants**

Plants are another poisonous hazard in the home. Children need to be taught not to eat any part of a plant unless they have permission from an adult. Decorate with plants that are not poisonous. If you are uncertain of a plant's identity, take it to a nursery or florist for identification. It is a good idea to label plants found in the home and throw away leaves as they die and fall.

If there is a suspected plant poisoning, immediately contact a physician or the Poison Control Center. Get a plant sample, because it will aid in diagnosis and treatment.

### **Supervision of Children**

Children have different safety needs as they mature. Children in their early years need constant supervision. Fences, gates and locks prevent young children from leaving hazard-free play areas or entering dangerous ones. Child-proof fasteners on cabinets containing poisonous materials are essential. These are available at hardware stores. As children progress from crawling to walking and climbing, make sure hazardous items are always out of their reach.

As children mature, they need to know basic rules. Adults need to be patient and allow time to enforce the rules. If the children don't understand, repeat the rules and discuss them until they do. It may help to have the children repeat the rules and demonstrate them.

Older teens share the work load on the farm and should be praised for their efforts. Because excitement and experimentation are part of growing up, teens need to be reminded of the rules. Adults supervising teens on the farm need to make sure they work safely.

Children of all ages, especially younger ones, need safe play areas. These areas should be far removed from equipment, animals

and chemical dangers. When other children come to visit, they need to know where they can and can't play. A designated play area should be free of danger, yet full of fun. Make sure play equipment is safe and meets child safety standards.

### **Tasks**

Take young worker's physical and mental development into account when assigning jobs. Teach them how to do the job safely and well. Provide needed protective equipment. Do not assign a youngster a job better suited to adult skills.

Tasks that are appropriate for older children include checking water levels, feeding animals and mucking stalls when the animals are out. Each task has its hazards, and children should be taught to avoid them. Teach children how to do the assigned task, and watch them do it.

### **Window Covering Cords**

Parents should know that children could accidentally strangle themselves in window covering cords. Keep cords out of the reach of children. Use a safety device available at local hardware or window covering stores. It could be a clamp or clothes pin, cleat or a tie-down device. The cord can also be tied to itself to shorten its length.

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## Firearms

Firearms and ammunition need to be stored where children cannot reach them. Never store loaded guns. Store ammunition in a locked place, separate from the firearms. Use locks on the firearms that children can't operate, and store firearms inside a locked cabinet.

## Electricity

Children need to be taught electrical safety, and parents need to use electricity wisely. Parents need to insert safety plugs in unused outlets when young children are in the home. Parents need to teach children not to chew on electrical cords. If possible, do not use extension cords. If they must be used, make sure they are inaccessible to children and never placed under rugs. Keep electrical boxes locked. Never use electrically powered tools near water. Make sure outlets near water are ground-fault interface (GFI) outlets.

## Water

Water can be dangerous and deadly in the home. Accidental drownings in the home take the lives of many young children each year. Do not leave bathing children unsupervised in the home. If there are toddlers in the home, remember to close toilet lids and keep aquariums out of reach. Turn down the water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit to avoid scalds and burns. Also, guard against microwave misuse. Opening packages cooked in the microwave can lead to steam burns. Never use electrical appliances near or around water. Water is an excellent conductor of electricity, and electrocution can happen in a matter of seconds.





This Maine Farm Safety fact sheet is part of an educational fact sheet series produced by University of Maine Cooperative Extension. For more information on farm safety, contact your county Extension office.

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