



---

## What to Do in a Fire

Fire drills are a big part of being safe in school: They prepare you for what you need to do in case of a fire. But what if there was a fire where you live? **Would you know what to do?** Talking about fires can be scary because no one likes to think about people getting hurt or their things getting burned. But you can feel less worried if you are prepared.

It's a good idea for families to talk about what they would do to escape a fire. Different families will have different strategies. Some kids live in one-story houses and other kids live in tall buildings. You'll want to talk about escape plans and escape routes, so let's start there.

### Know Your Way Out

An escape plan can help every member of a family get out of a burning house. The idea is to get outside **quickly and safely**. Smoke from a fire can make it hard to see where things are, so it's important to learn and remember the different ways out of your home. How many exits are there? How do you get to them from your room? It's a good idea to have your family draw a map of the escape plan.

It's possible one way out could be blocked by fire or smoke, so you'll want to know where other ones are. And if you live in an apartment building, you'll want to know the best way to the stairwell or other emergency exits.

### Safety Steps

If you're in a room with the door closed when the fire breaks out, you need to take a few extra steps:

- Check to see if there's heat or smoke coming in the cracks around the door. (You're checking to see if there's fire on the other side.)
- If you see smoke coming under the door — **don't open the door!**
- If you don't see smoke — touch the door. If the door is hot or very warm — **don't open the door!**
- If you don't see smoke — and the door is not hot — then use your fingers to lightly touch the doorknob. **If the doorknob is hot or very warm — don't open the door!**

If the doorknob feels cool, and you can't see any smoke around the door, you can open the door very carefully and slowly. When you open the door, if you feel a burst of heat, or smoke pours into the room, quickly shut the door and make sure it is really closed. If there's no smoke or heat when you open the door, **go toward your escape route exit.**

### Stay Low

If you can see smoke in the house, stay low to the ground as you make your way to the exit. In a

fire, smoke and poisonous air hurt more people than the actual flames do. You'll breathe less smoke if you stay close to the ground. Smoke naturally rises, so if there is smoke while you're using your escape route, staying low means you can crawl under most of it. You can drop to the floor and **crawl on your hands and knees** below the smoke.

Exiting through a door that leads outside should be your first choice as an escape route, but also ask your parents about windows and if they would be possible escape routes. Even windows on a higher floor could be safe escape routes if you had help, like from a firefighter or another adult.

Ask your parents to teach you how to unlock the windows, open them, and remove the screen, if needed. Make sure you only do this in an emergency! Lots of kids are injured because they fall out of windows.

Sometimes, families even have collapsible rescue ladders that can be used to escape from upper floors of a house. If you have one, ask your mom or dad to show you how it works.

In addition to planning your escape routes, you'll also want to know where family members will meet outside. This is helpful because then everyone shows up in one place and you'll know that everyone is safe. You might choose the front porch of a neighbor's house or some other nearby spot.

It's normal to worry about your pets or a favorite toy, but if there is a fire, you have to leave them behind. The most important thing is that you get out safely. It's also important to know that you shouldn't stay in the house any longer than you must — not even to call 911. Someone else can make that call from outside. Once you're out, **do not** go back in for anything — even pets. You can tell the fire rescue people about any pets that were left behind and they may be able to help.

### **What if You Can't Get Out Right Away?**

If you can't get out fast, because fire or smoke is blocking an escape route, you'll want to yell for help. You can do this from an open window or call 911 if you have a phone with you.

Even if you're scared, **never** hide under the bed or in a closet. Then, firefighters will have a hard time finding you. Know that firefighters or other adults will be looking for you to help you out safely. The sooner they find you, the sooner you both can get out.

In the meanwhile, keep heat and smoke from getting through the door by blocking the cracks around the door with sheets, blankets, and/or clothing. If there is a window in the room that is not possible to escape from, open it wide and stand in front of it. If you can grab a piece of clothing or a towel, place it over your mouth to keep from breathing in the smoke. This works even better if you wet the cloth first.

### **Home Drills**

It's great to talk about emergency plans, but it's even better if you practice them, like the fire drills you have at school. Having a fire drill at home gives everyone a chance to see how they would react in a real emergency. You can see how quickly and safely everyone can get out of the house. Your family should practice this drill twice a year, every year. It's also a good time to remind your parents to change the batteries in the smoke alarms.

A good rule of thumb during a home fire drill is to see if your family can safely get out the house using the escape routes and meet outside at the same place within **3 minutes**. For an extra challenge, you might try variations, like pretending that the front door was blocked and you couldn't get out that way.

### If Your Clothes Catch Fire

A person's clothes could catch fire during a fire or by accident, like if you step too close to a candle. If this happens, don't run! Instead, stop, drop to the ground, cover your face with your hands, and roll. This will cut off the air and put out the flames. An easy way to remember this is: **Stop, Drop, and Roll!**

### Preventing Fires

Every year, kids of all ages start over 35,000 fires that hurt people and damage property. You can do your part to prevent fires by **never** playing with matches, lighters, and other fire sources. Also stay away from fireplaces, candles, and stoves. By following this advice, you'll be doing important work — preventing fires in the first place!

Reviewed by: Kate M. Cronan, MD

Date reviewed: May 2008

---



Note: All information on KidsHealth® is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

© 1995-2009 The Nemours Foundation. All rights reserved.