

11. Myths and facts about house fires

Fire Myths and Facts

Think you know about house fires? Separate fact from fiction with the common myths and misconceptions below.

Do you REALLY know fire? Test your house fire facts in this quiz adapted from Kidde Canada and be aware of fire facts, myths and realities to protect the ones you love.

Myth: Pets can sense danger and they usually escape a fire.

Reality: Household pets are actually very vulnerable to and often victims of fires. Smoke can damage the lungs of a dog or cat in minutes, and sparks can cause painful burns that can remain undetected under the fur. Your escape plan should, when practical, include plans to get your pets out as well.

Myth: Fire spreads slowly and takes a long time to get out of control.

Reality: A small flame can turn into a major fire in less than 30 seconds, and it can take as few as 3-5 minutes for an entire house to fill with dense, dark smoke and become engulfed in flames. Practise your 3 Minute Drill.

Myth: Small, decorative candles do not pose a real fire risk.

Reality: House fires started by a candle have nearly tripled from a decade ago. Even a small candle can start a major fire and all fires start small. Never leave candles unattended and always ensure they are solidly mounted in a non-combustible base.

Myth: In a fire, the flames are the greatest threat.

Reality: Unlike the fires commonly shown on TV or in films, real fires produce large amounts of thick, black smoke that obscures vision, causes nausea and may lead to unconsciousness and death. Smoke is full of toxic by-products, including carbon monoxide. These poisonous gases are responsible for most deaths and injuries in fires, not the actual flames.

Myth: Most fires happen in industrial buildings and wooded areas.

Reality: Seven out of 10 fires in Canada start at home. Most fire fatalities occur in the home as well. More fires begin in the kitchen than in any other room in the home.

Myth: Leaving the kitchen briefly while food is cooking is safe.

Reality: Most kitchen fires occur because people get distracted and leave their cooking unattended. It takes seconds for a pot or pan to spatter grease or overheat, creating a fire that can quickly spread. Cooking fires are the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries.

Myth: Most children know not to play with matches and lighters.

Reality: Children are naturally curious, and this can be dangerous. Hundreds of children die or are seriously injured in fires each year in North America. Children are much more likely to be injured in a fire than adults and are often victims of their own curiosity.

Myth: Kids will instinctively run from fire and escape a burning house.

Reality: When children see smoke or fire, they often try to hide instead of flee. Smoke can overcome a child very quickly. Parents need to teach children fire safety and escape plans and practise with them regularly. Also test the smoke alarm with your children present so they can recognize the sound, as studies show this can help them wake up in a real emergency.