

OLDER WISER

HOME FIRE SAFETY CHECK for family and friends of older adults

When it comes to fire, adults over age 65 are at greater risk than any other group. As most fire deaths occur in the home, it is important that older people know how to protect themselves. If you have a relative or friend in this vulnerable group, please take a few minutes to complete this fire safety check of their home. It could be a lifesaver.

Part A is the physical fire safety check of the older adult's home. It should be conducted once each month by a relative or friend.

Part B consists of 14 questions to ask the older adult. These questions should be asked once, with periodic reminders.

What to do if you are concerned

If possible, take measures to correct the situation. Advise the older person that he/she is at risk of fire and injury. Remember, it is extremely difficult to change established habits. If the older person will not change the risky behavior - such as smoking in bed - appropriate safeguards must be put in place or alternative plans made. Contact your fire department or the Community Care Access Centre in your area for advice or assistance.

Part A

Conduct the following fire safety checks:



1 Check that there are working smoke alarms on every level of the home and outside sleeping areas



2 Make sure the older person can hear the alarm when it activates.

If they can't contact the local fire department for advice.



3 Check that the smoke alarms have been tested.

If not, test the smoke alarm by pressing the alarm test button, which is usually located in the centre of the alarm. If it difficult to reach, use a broom handle or ruler to test it.



4 Check that the batteries have been changed within the past year.

Batteries should be replaced each year. It is a good idea to mark the date on the batteries so that anyone will know when it was replaced. A chirping sound indicates a low battery, but this sound can be difficult for an older person to hear or recognize.



5 Check for scorch marks on pots and pans.

If you find scorch marks, discuss with the older person. He/she may be leaving cooking unattended.



6 Check that clothing, bedding, furniture and floors are free of cigarette burns.

If you find cigarette burns, discuss the situation with your older friend or relative.



Part B

Ask your older friend or relative the following questions:



1. “Do you know how to leave quickly if there is a fire?”

Check that the older person knows two ways out in case the main route is blocked by smoke or flames. Check that all doors and windows in the escape route can be easily opened



2. “Do you have a neighbour who can help in an emergency?”

Can your friend or relative walk to a neighbour’s house to call the fire department?
In apartments, is there a neighbour who can help when the alarm sounds?



3. “Is there a phone near the bed in case you need help?”

Make sure the emergency number is posted on the phone.



4. “What would you do if the room filled with smoke?”

Demonstrate how to crawl low under smoke to safety.



5. (For apartment dwellers) “Do you know the sound of the fire alarm and what to do when the alarm sounds?”

Find out the correct procedures from building management.



6. “Do you ever leave cooking unattended?”

Tell the older person to turn off the stove before leaving the kitchen, use a timer, or take an item such as a potholder with them as a reminder.



7. “Do you know what to do if a pot on the stove catches fire?”

Keep a proper fitting lid nearby and slide it over the burning pot.



8. “Are there combustibles, such as tea towels or curtains near the stove?”

Keep anything that can easily catch fire away from the stove.



9. “Do you wear tight-fitting or rolled up sleeves when you use the stove?”

Dangling sleeves can easily brush against a hot burner and catch fire



10. “Are you careful not to reach over hot burners?”

Use the front burners as much as possible.



11. “Do you keep portable heaters at least 1 meter (3 feet) from any combustible materials, such as drapes, clothing or furniture?”

Remind your friend or relative that portable heaters should never be used to dry clothing, tea towels, gloves, etc.



12. “Do you consider yourself to be a careful smoker?”

Smokers should use large, deep ashtrays and never smoke when drowsy or in bed.



13. “Where do you empty your ashtrays?”

Ashtrays should be emptied into the toilet or a non-combustible can.



14. “Are you careful when you drink and smoke?”

Drinking alcohol while smoking is a deadly combination and accounts for many fire deaths.

