

Keeping Safe in Viking Homes

Vikings' homes were usually 'longhouses' made of wood, stone, blocks of turf or wattle and daub. They had a thatched or turf roof, but no windows. Living, sleeping and cooking all took place in the one room. Animals and people all lived in the same building - the animals at one end and the people at the other. Imagine trying to sleep with the sound of sheep bleating and pigs grunting!

Vikings were famous for being fierce and not afraid of being hurt in battle. They made raids on other lands, travelling long distances in their ships from Scandinavia. Battles were dangerous, but there were also risks in Viking homes, and people had to make sure they stayed safe. As you read about some of the dangers found in Viking homes, think about which ones still exist today.



Danger from fire and heat

There was a long hearth in the middle of the room with an open fire for light, warmth and for cooking - this was kept burning all day. People had to be careful when moving around near the fire. They had to make sure that wooden items, hay and other materials that might catch fire were kept away from it. There was no chimney, just a hole in the roof to let the smoke escape. Otherwise smoke would make it difficult to breathe.

Danger from trips, slips and falls

- Vikings didn't have modern day machinery to help them build their homes. They used ladders made from branches to climb up to their roofs. They had to make sure these were strong and wouldn't break. It was safest to ask a friend to hold the bottom of the ladder steady while they climbed up.
- Villages were often built near rivers and the banks could be slippery. Children had to be careful when playing and running about, so they didn't slip or fall in.
- Longhouses didn't have flushing toilets like today's homes. When Vikings had to go to the toilet, they used a hole dug into the ground outside the house. They had to watch their step on a dark night!

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Keeping Safe in Viking Homes (Continued)

Danger from sharp things

Vikings made the things they needed. They made pottery jugs, wooden plates and spoons, and ornaments from animal bone - all of these could be sharp when broken. Men made tools of iron, such as sickles, picks, hoes and ploughshares. Vikings also owned many weapons (e.g. swords, spears and battle-axes). It was important that these sharp things were stored safely so people didn't cut or hurt themselves. Weapons were often hung on the wall or stored in a chest.



Danger from poisons

- Vikings grew or gathered their own food from the local environment. They had to make sure they didn't eat anything poisonous, so they had to learn which berries and mushrooms were safe and which could make them sick. Food was kept in wooden barrels to try to keep it fresh.
- Some Vikings bathed once a week in tubs in specially built bath-houses, using water from wells or streams. It was important to keep as clean as possible to avoid the spread of infections and disease.

