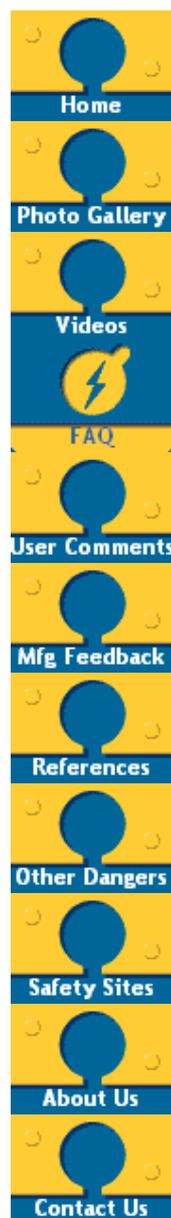


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Frequently Asked Questions

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The bottom line is:

Safety is designed into UK sockets - plug in covers reduce safety!

ANSWERS:

The shutters in my sockets do not open when I put in an upside down cover, why?

BS 1363 allows two methods of opening the shutters, the original method of using the earth pin is still used by most manufacturers, but some use a method which requires both the lower pins to be inserted at the same time, this reduces the danger associated with inserting a cover upside down, but is no protection against the type of cover which allows paper clips and needles to be inserted into the live parts. The safest option is to rely on the protection required by law in a BS 1363 socket, and not add any unnecessary and potentially dangerous plug in covers. [Top^](#)

I run a child nursery/playgroup and have heard that I must fit safety covers, is this true?

We have asked the relevant inspecting authorities about this. Ofsted (England), Care Commission (Scotland), Estyn (Wales) and the Northern Ireland Education and Training Inspectorate have all confirmed to us that, whilst they do require sockets to be safe, they do not mandate the use of socket covers. If this becomes an issue for you please draw the attention of the inspector to the safety provided by BS-1363, and the information provided on this website. You could also ensure that they are aware of [RoSPA policy](#). Should you find that an inspector is encouraging you to put your children at risk by encouraging the use of plug-in socket covers we would appreciate hearing about it. [Top^](#)

If sockets are safe, why are socket covers on sale?

Most countries do not specify that sockets must be protected by safety shutters, so plug-in covers to go into sockets were developed as a way of keeping fingers and other objects away from dangerous voltages. Ignorance of the situation in the UK led to UK versions of socket covers being offered for sale. They are marketed as "Home safety essentials" using such phrases as "essential for keeping curious little fingers away from sockets", "reduces the risk of children sticking a finger or an object into a wall socket" etc. Whilst these claims are valid in other countries, they are completely inappropriate in the UK. [Top^](#)

My house has round pin sockets, are these dangerous? Should I use covers with them?

Before the introduction of the BS 1363 13 amp socket British homes were wired using a variety of round pin sockets. If your wiring system is very old then you should seek advice from a reputable electrical contractor about testing and possible re-wiring. Some round pin sockets are still used in modern installations for specialist purposes, for example 5 amp sockets are sometimes used in lighting circuits to allow floor lamps etc to be controlled by a central switch. Round pin sockets used in the UK are now required to meet BS 546, which does call for shutters. However there are still some older versions without shutters in use, and these should be replaced. We have not been able to find any suppliers offering socket covers to fit British round pin sockets. [Top^](#)

I notice that the top hole in my sockets does not have a shutter, surely this is dangerous?

The top (larger) hole in a BS 1363 socket is the earth connection. This is a point which is literally connected to the earth and is there as a safety measure, all exposed metal parts of an electrical device which is plugged into the socket must be connected to this terminal. UK wiring regulations also require that plumbing pipes, taps and radiators are electrically connected to this same earth. Touching this earth is therefore safe, providing of course that you are not touching a live wire at the same time. BS 1363 specifies that it shall not be possible to contact any live part by sticking something into the earth pin hole. [Top^](#)

If I can open the shutters in a socket by using a socket cover upside down, surely I can do the same thing with a proper plug?

Firstly, you should always ensure that you do not leave any mains device with a plug attached within reach of children.

Secondly, it is possible, but much more difficult, to defeat the safety shutters with a proper plug. There are several reasons for this additional difficulty. The earth pins of socket covers are normally the same size as a plug, but the other pins tend to be between 2mm and 5mm shorter than standard. This means that it is possible to insert an upside down socket cover significantly deeper into the earth socket than is possible with a plug. A plug will always be of rigid construction, so when the shorter pins of an upside down plug hit the surface of the socket, you cannot force it any further. Contrast this with a socket cover which, being of fairly flimsy construction will have a much greater degree of flexibility than a plug, thus allowing an even greater degree of penetration.

Even if you do succeed in opening the shutters with an inverted plug you will find that is much less likely to stay in place than is an inverted socket cover. This is because the penetration, and therefore the resistance to removal, is so much less, and the significantly heavier plug, together with its cable, will tend to fall out. Of course, an inverted plug with the cable going up rather than down will also be much more obvious to an adult. [Top^](#)

How many injuries or deaths have been caused by the use of socket covers?

We have been unable to find any statistics which detail the exact causes of death by electric shock in the home. Our position is simply that the possibility of electrocution caused by the use of socket covers in UK sockets is clearly demonstrable, while we have identified no benefit attributable to their use. [Top^](#)

What about socket covers which do not plug in, but are fixed to the socket?

We have not evaluated this type of socket cover. There is no obvious danger in covering an empty socket with a device which does not interfere with the shutter mechanism. However, we do have reservations about the type of cover which permits it to be locked in the closed position, without access to the socket switch, while in use, ie with a plug in place. It is important that you always have access to your sockets to either switch off the power or pull the plug in the event of an emergency or for repair. This is why equipment such as cookers and immersion heaters are always provided with easily accessible isolation switches. A locked cover could be a source of real danger in an emergency, if the key is not immediately to hand. If you have this type of safety cover please familiarise yourself with how to safely switch off the main electricity supply in an emergency – if in doubt, ask a reputable electrical contractor to show you. [Top^](#)

How else can I protect my children from electric shock?

Most recent homes have additional protection in the form of residual current devices (RCDs). These have been compulsory in new installations since July 2008, and recommended for most socket outlet circuits in homes for a number of years, particularly where the outlet is used for equipment outdoors. An RCD detects currents which flow between the live or neutral wire and ground, as opposed to normal currents which flow between live and neutral. Such currents occur when there is a fault condition, such as a short circuit – which may be due to human contact – and turn off the current in a short time. If you do not already have RCDs protecting your home then it is well worth consulting a reputable electrical contractor about having them fitted. [Top^](#)

How can I tell if the shutters in my sockets are working correctly?

It should be obvious if you take a close look at the lower two holes in each socket. You should ensure that you are looking with your eyes at the same level as the socket, you may need to use a torch to see clearly.

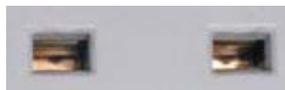


This is a typical socket with closed shutters. Note that both holes are covered by a shutter, the colour of the shutter material will vary, grey and red are typical colours.



If your sockets are the type in which the shutters are operated by the insertion of both the lower pins at the same time, like this MK model, the closed shutters will look something like this. You can see that the shutters are shaped to ensure they operate only if a plug is inserted.

If the shutters are not working then you will see the internal contacts.



This is what fully or partly opened shutters look like. If you have sockets like this they **MUST** be replaced without delay.



Also, remember to check the shutters on any multi-way adaptors and extension cables you may have. [Top^](#)

Don't socket covers also prevent children plugging in dangerous appliances?

The problem with this idea is that, as we have shown, plug-in covers are often easy for children to remove, also, the Clippasafe/Boots/John Lewis type is designed to be removed with the help of the plug which is supposedly being prevented from use! To act as prevention against the use of dangerous appliances, plug-in socket covers would need to meet the following criteria:

Covers would need to be very difficult to remove by children possessing the skills to insert a plug. There are no such plug-in covers on the market.

Covers would need to be demonstrably safe and not compromise the safety features of BS 1363 sockets. There are no such plug-in covers on the market.

If covers meeting the above criteria were available then, to be effective, they would **need to be used in every socket which was within reach of a child**. This includes those sockets which would normally have plugs inserted into them, as clearly the plug of another appliance is not difficult for the child to remove. Would you be prepared to do this?

The big danger of suggesting that socket covers have a role to play in preventing children using dangerous appliances is that it detracts from the only sensible message: Parents and carers should ensure that ALL dangerous appliances are kept beyond the reach of children.

[Top^](#)

The bottom line is:

Safety is designed into UK sockets - plug in covers reduce safety!

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