



Playing it Safe this Holiday Season

Each year, more than 3 billion toys and games are sold in the United States, and more than half of those are sold during the holiday season alone. Although the majority of toys are safe, they can become dangerous if misused or if they fall into the hands of children who are too young to play with them.

It is important for parents to follow the age and safety recommendations on the labels of each toy. The Child Safety Protection Act, a federal toy labeling law, requires manufacturers to place warning labels on toys that pose a choking hazard to young children.

When Selecting a Toy this Season

- Choose toys suitable to your child's age, abilities and skill level. Toys that are not appropriate for your child's age group may pose safety hazards.
- Avoid toys with small removable parts, which could pose a choking hazard to children under age 3. To be sure, use a small parts tester (which can be purchased at a toy or baby specialty store) or the tube from a roll of toilet paper. If the piece fits entirely inside the tube, then it is considered a choking hazard.
- Look for high-quality design and construction. Make sure eyes, noses and other possible small parts are tightly secured.
- Avoid sharp points or edges on toys for kids under the age of 8.
- Avoid electrical toys with heating elements (batteries, electrical plugs) for children under the age of 8. These toys are a potential burn hazard.
- Avoid toys that produce loud noises. Toy guns and high-volume games can permanently impair a child's hearing.
- Avoid toys with strings, straps or cords longer than 7 inches, which can wrap around a child's neck and accidentally strangle him or her.
- Be sure to read the labels on all toys. Be aware of age and safety recommendations, and use the information as a guide.

Follow Age Recommendations When Selecting Toys

Many toy-related injuries occur when parents overestimate their child's ability to handle a toy designed for an older age group. Safe Kids Worldwide recommends the following guidelines for age-appropriate toys:

- **Infants under age 1**

In the first few months of life, children are immobile. In the second six months, children become more mobile and are at increased risk for choking. The most suitable toys for the first year include activity quilts, stuffed animals without button noses or eyes, bath toys, soft dolls, baby swings, cloth books and squeaky toys.

- **Children ages 1 to 3**

Children at this age are curious and have little sense of danger. They like to climb, jump, throw and tumble. The best toys for this age group are books, blocks, fit-together toys, balls, push and pull toys, pounding toys and shape toys.

- **Children ages 3 to 5**

Children at this age love to run. They begin to test their physical strength and develop skills such as the ability to ride a tricycle, finger control and the ability to build with large blocks and construction materials. Toys that are most suitable for this age group include approved nontoxic art supplies, books, videos, musical instruments and outdoor toys such as a baseball tee, slide or swing.

- **Children ages 5 to 9**

During the early years of this age group, children become more creative and more physically active. They can write and play with arts and crafts. They are also able to use simple mechanical toys, such as cars and trains. Recommended toys include craft materials, jump ropes, puppets, books, electric trains (after 8 years) and sports equipment. Remember, children ages 8 and up can begin to use electrical and battery-operated toys. Don't allow children to change batteries.

- **Children ages 9 to 14**

At this age, children enjoy team sports and games that require increased dexterity, such as pick-up sticks, marbles and jacks. Strenuous physical activity is also popular for this age group. Children may begin to develop hobbies and a strong interest in scientific activities. For these children, appropriate gifts include computers, microphones, table and board games, and outdoor and team sports equipment. Ensure that older children's toys are kept out of reach of younger children, for whom they may present a danger.

A Gift is Not Complete Unless Proper Protective Gear is Included

Bicycles, in-line skates, scooters, skateboards and sleds are also popular gifts for the holidays. If children lack the proper protective gear or skills, injury and death can occur. In 2002, 130 children ages 14 and under died in bicycle-related crashes. In 2003, nearly 285,600 children ages 14 and under were treated in hospital emergency rooms for bicycle-related injuries.

- Include a helmet as part of a gift. A helmet is a necessity. Bicycle helmets have been shown to reduce the risk of head injury by as much as 85 percent and the risk of brain injury as much as 88 percent. The helmet should meet the standards developed by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.
- Buy retroactive clothing, stickers or bike reflectors. Use a light and reflectors on the front, sides and back of the bike to increase the child's visibility to drivers.
- Buy a bike horn or a bell as a stocking stuffer. This tool is essential for warning motorists and pedestrians of a bicyclist's approach.
- Do not forget to buy elbow and knee pads. Make sure to include wrist guards for in-line skates, roller skates and skateboards.
- Give a gift of in-line skating lessons from a professional instructor or a community recreation center. A class can provide invaluable instruction on how to skate properly and proper techniques.
- Buy a sled that is constructed sturdily and safely. Avoid equipment with sharp and jagged edges. Do not let children go sledding near roadways.

Check for Recent Recalls

Visit the Web site of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (www.cpsc.gov) regularly to obtain information on recent toy recalls. Be sure to return the warranty and product registration forms for new toy purchases to ensure that you will be notified of any recalls.

Additional Safety Information

Visit the Web site of Safe Kids USA (www.usa.safekids.org) for more information about accidental injury prevention in children 0-14, safety tips, fact sheets and more. Or contact Chrissy Cianflone, Home and Fire Safety Manager, Safe Kids Worldwide on 202-662-0625 or ccianflone@safekids.org.