

The Medical Minute: Toy safety tips when shopping for holiday gifts

December 15 2010, By Susan Rzucidlo

The holiday season is here, and for many kids that means one thing -- toys. Approximately 50 percent of all toy purchases in the United States occur between the Friday after Thanksgiving and Christmas. Since December is such a popular month for gift-buying, it only makes sense that it has been named the official Safe Toys and Gifts Month. Often, people get so caught up in gift buying that they don't stop to consider if the gifts they're purchasing are safe for children.

The U.S. [Consumer Product Safety Commission](#) (CPSC) has released its top five toy hazards:

- Scooters and other riding [toys](#) – Riding toys, skateboards and in-line skates go fast, and falls could be deadly. Helmets and safety gear should be worn at all times and be sized to fit.
- Small balls and other toys with small parts – For children younger than age 3, avoid toys with small parts, which can cause choking.
- Balloons - Children under 8 years old can choke or suffocate on uninflated or broken balloons. Keep uninflated balloons from children. Discard broken balloons at once.
- Magnets – For children under age 6, avoid building or play sets with small magnets. If magnets or pieces with magnets are swallowed, serious injuries or death can occur.

-- Chargers and adapters – Charging batteries should be supervised by adults. Chargers and adapters can pose thermal burn hazards to children.

Also keep in mind that the American Academy of Pediatrics:

- recommends against the home use of trampolines;
- recommends that children under 16 years old shouldn't ride on four-wheeled all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and advises a ban on the sale of all three-wheeled ATVs; and
- advises that children are at big risk of getting hurt from nonpowder guns, like BB guns, pellet guns, air rifles, and paintball guns.

The following information is excerpted from www.toyinfo.org to assist with safe toy choices when shopping and when opening gifts. Always double check product recalls online at www.cpsc.gov/ , the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission website. With the increased popularity of second-hand stores and online vendors, gift-givers should be especially vigilant to prevent the purchase of hazardous toys or products that have been recalled, banned or do not meet current safety standards.

When shopping for toys and gifts:

- Check and follow age recommendations and other safety information on packaging (age grading is based mostly on safety and the child's development).
- Consider purchasing a gift of safety, such as a bike helmet, the next stage of car seat such as for a child who may be ready to graduate to a booster seat, sports safety gear, or smoke or carbon monoxide alarms.
- Avoid toys with small parts for children under age 3.

- Make sure that batteries in toys are firmly enclosed and inaccessible to children.
- For children under 18 month old, avoid toys with strings, straps or cords longer than 12 inches.
- Check to see that plush (stuffed) toys have age-appropriate features such as embroidered or secured eyes and noses for younger children and seams that are reinforced to withstand an older child's play.
- Avoid toys with sharp points or rough edges, especially for younger children.

Once the packages are opened:

- Read instructions carefully; save directions, warranties and assembly hardware.
- Role play the right way to use the toy or game and explain to your child the importance of proper use.
- Dispose of all unnecessary toy packaging and gift-wrap as soon as possible. Piles of discarded gift-wrap can conceal sharp objects or the edges of hard plastic packaging that can cut small fingers.
- Store toys safely in an easily accessible storage bin; lidded toy storage should be non-locking and have special safety features such as air holes, spring-loaded hinges and clearances at the hinges to make sure little fingers won't get caught.
- Keep a separate toy chest for older children whose toys may contain small parts; enlist their help in keeping their toys out of reach of younger siblings.

More information: For more tips on how to keep your family safe throughout the year, visit www.usa.safekids.org or www.pennstatehershey.org/injuryprevention

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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