

Think before you shop: A guide to safe holiday gift buying

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(Medical Xpress)—At this time of year, most of us are busy planning the holiday experience for families and loved ones. For the kids, it's about the anticipation and the toys.

In the midst of the holiday baking, cooking and shopping, the last thing on our minds is often whether or not that hard to find Lego set or the doll that eats, drinks and wets itself is age appropriate and safe.

"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 their children," said Susan Rzucidlo, M.S.N., R.N., [Pediatric Trauma](#) and Injury Prevention Program manager, Safe Kids Dauphin County at Penn State Hershey Children's Hospital.

Rzucidlo says it is critical to buy the right toy for the right age. Toys should be developmentally appropriate to suit the skills, abilities and interests of the child. Even if you think a child is ahead intellectually for their age or can grow into the toy, the most important factor to consider is safety.

The U.S. Consumer [Product Safety Commission](#) (CPSC) holds toy manufacturers to strict safety standards and requires them to label toys for age appropriateness. Always refer to labels for proper age recommendations. Toys labeled "not recommended for children under three" contain small parts that may pose a choking hazard, for example.

Batteries are one concern that consumers will find on [warning labels](#). Rzucidlo said small, "button" batteries are of particular concern. The batteries are about the size of a nickel and easily swallowed. Used increasingly in common [household items](#), these batteries are also found in the musical greeting cards that have grown in popularity. The cards can easily be taken or torn apart by a child. Make sure any batteries in toys are firmly enclosed and inaccessible to children.

Also, for children younger than 18 months of age, avoid toys with strings, straps or cords longer than 12 inches. Parents should make sure that plush toys have age-appropriate features such as embroidered or secured eyes and noses, and seams that are reinforced to withstand an older child's play. Avoid toys with sharp points or rough edges. Test it yourself if in doubt. Look for toys labeled non-toxic, especially when buying craft supplies. Avoid anything containing magnets, which are another dangerous swallowing hazard for younger children.

When choosing a gift for any child of any age, Rzucidlo recommends referring to the CPSC on what to avoid. The CPSC's Top 5 toy hazards are:

- Scooters and other riding toys
- Small balls and other small [toys](#)
- Balloons
- Magnets
- Battery chargers and adapters

The American Academy of Pediatrics advises against the home use of trampolines, allowing children younger than 16 to ride all-terrain vehicles and purchasing non-powder guns like BB guns, pellet guns, air rifles and paintball guns for children of any age.

Once the packages are open, nothing replaces adult supervision and parental involvement, Rzucidlo said.

"Adult involvement is key for safety, as well as to get the most out of the toy to benefit the child," said Rzucidlo, who also suggests role-playing to show the child proper toy use. She also reminds parents to watch little ones who may be around older siblings who may have received gifts that are not appropriate for young children.

Product recalls are available at www.cpsc.gov, where you can sign up to receive recall notices via email.

For more tips on how to keep your family safe during the holidays and throughout the year, visit www.usa.safekids.org or www.pennstatehershey.org/injuryprevention or contact Safe Kids Dauphin County Coalition, led by Penn State Hershey Children's Hospital, at 717-531-SAFE (7233).

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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