

A child is treated in a US emergency department every three minutes for a toy-related injury

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A small child in Mumbai, with a shaved head, eating bread with her hand.
Credit: Wen-Yan King/Wikipedia

'Tis the season for toys. Children are writing lists full of them, and parents are standing in lines (or tapping on computers) trying to find them. Playing with toys this season or any other is an important way for children to develop, learn, and explore. But anyone planning to buy new toys, or anyone with toys already at home, should know that many toys pose an injury risk to children.

In a first-of-its-kind study, researchers in the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital have found that an estimated 3,278,073 children were treated in United States emergency departments from 1990 through 2011 for a toy-related injury. In 2011, a child was treated every 3 minutes for such an injury. Slightly more than half of the injuries happened among children younger than 5 years of age.

The study, published online today in *Clinical Pediatrics* and appearing in print in the February issue, also found that the rate of injury rose almost 40% during the 22-year period that researchers analyzed. Much of that increase was associated with foot-powered scooters.

"A child's job is play, and toys are the tools," said Gary Smith, MD, DrPH, the study's senior author and director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital. "We want children to explore, challenge themselves, and develop while using those tools safely."

Children of different ages face different hazards from toys, Dr. Smith said. Children younger than 3 years of age are at particular risk of choking on small toys and small parts of toys. During the study period, there were more than 109,000 cases of children younger than 5 swallowing or inhaling "foreign bodies," the equivalent of almost 14 cases per day.

As children get older, injuries involving riding toys increase. Those toys—which include foot-powered scooters, wagons, and tricycles—were associated with 42% of injuries to children 5 to 17 years of age and 28% of injuries to children younger than 5. Injuries with ride-on toys were 3 times more likely to involve a broken bone or a dislocation than other toys. Falls (46%) and collisions (22%) were the most common ways that children of all ages were injured in association with toys of all categories.

Foot-powered scooters are of special concern. From 2000, after the scooters first became popular, through 2011, there were an estimated 580,037 injuries, or about 1 every 11 minutes. Much of the increase in the overall toy [injury](#) rate after 1999 is due to foot-powered scooters.

"The frequency and increasing rate of injuries to children associated with toys, especially those associated with foot-powered scooters, is concerning," said Smith, who is also professor of pediatrics at The Ohio State University. "This underscores the need for increased efforts to prevent these injuries to children. Important opportunities exist for improvements in toy safety standards, product design, recall effectiveness, and consumer education."

Parents and child caregivers can help children stay safe with toys by following these tips:

- Follow age restrictions and other manufacturer guidelines for all toys.
- Examine toys for small parts that could be choking hazards for young [children](#).
- Use riding toys on dry, flat surfaces away from vehicle traffic.
- Closely supervise any child who is younger than 8 years of age on a riding toy.
- Wear helmets, knee pads, and elbow pads on scooters and other

riding toys with wheels.

- Check [Recalls.gov](https://www.recalls.gov) to see if [toys](#) that you own or may buy have been recalled.

Provided by Nationwide Children's Hospital

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