

Eye specialist warns parents about dangers of Nerf guns

June 28 2019, by Gillian Rutherford



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A University of Alberta ophthalmologist wants safety rules put in place for Nerf toys, after a patient was shot in the eye and nearly lost her

vision.

The 43-year-old woman was accidentally struck by a dart in her left eye from a distance of about six metres last year.

Matthew Tennant diagnosed retinal dialysis, a tear in the retina that can lead to a detached retina and vision loss.

"You can think of the eye as a basketball," he said. "When you bounce the ball, it compresses down and widens sideways. Trauma can cause the same thing to the eye, and that sudden stretching causes a tear to the retina."

Tennant was able to halt the detachment, and the patient recovered with full central vision and limited loss to her peripheral vision.

"If we hadn't done something, the retina would have come off and she would have lost all of her [vision](#)," he said. "She was lucky that it was caught early."

Tennant reported the case in the *Canadian Journal of Ophthalmology* this month. He is now working with the Canadian Ophthalmological Society to create a [policy statement](#) on the use of toy projectile weapons, including Nerf, Airsoft and paintball, to inform manufacturers and the public.

Hasbro, which makes Nerf toys, has been in contact with Tennant to learn which model was used in the accident.

He said the toys have better gun springs and heavier foam bullets than in the past.

"Bullets that used to go 50 km/h are now able to fly at 110 km/h and as a

result, they are more dangerous," he said.

Tennant, whose 11-year-old twins are no longer allowed to play with Nerf toys, recommends that parents supervise their children's play and equip them with eye protection.

He would like eye protection to be mandatory, much like face cages on the helmets of minor hockey players and seatbelts in cars.

"Some people would say that seatbelts take the fun out of driving," he said. "But they sure save a lot of lives."

Safety rules for parents

U of A ophthalmologist Matthew Tennant recommends three ways parents can help keep their children's eyes safe when playing with Nerf guns or other toys that fire projectiles:

- Do not let your children use Nerf guns unsupervised.
- Do not let your children use Nerf guns without eye protection—preferably a face mask, but at minimum, wraparound polycarbonate glasses.
- Educate your kids to never shoot at the face or eyes. Better yet, limit them to shooting at objects only, not people.

More information: Tyler Henry et al. Traumatic retinal dialysis resulting from Nerf foam bullet, *Canadian Journal of Ophthalmology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jcjo.2018.08.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcjo.2018.08.008)

Provided by University of Alberta

Citation: Eye specialist warns parents about dangers of Nerf guns (2019, June 28) retrieved 18 April 2024 from

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