

Toy Safety

Few things make a child happier than a new toy or game. However, what seems to be harmless fun could result in a serious injury. Due to tough government regulations and efforts by US toy makers to test products, most toys on the market today are safe. Still, thousands of children suffer toy-related injuries every year. Although most toy-related injuries are minor cuts, scrapes, and bruises, children can sometimes be seriously injured or even killed by dangerous toys or misuse of toys. By knowing what to look for when buying toys and practicing a few simple ideas for safe use, you can often prevent problems before they occur.

Tips for buying toys

Use the following guidelines to choose safe and age appropriate toys for your child

- 1. Read the label** before buying the toy. Warning labels provide important information about how to use a toy, what ages the toy is safe for, and whether adult supervision is recommended. Be sure to show your child how to use the toy properly.
- 2. Think LARGE** when it comes to choosing toys. Make sure all toys and parts are larger than your child's mouth to prevent choking. Avoid small toys intended for older children that could fit into your child's mouth. This will decrease the risk of choking.
- 3. Avoid toys that make loud or shrill noises** to help protect your child's hearing. Ask to try the toy in the store. Check the loudness of the sound it makes. Don't buy toys that may be too loud for your child's sensitive hearing.
- 4. Look for sturdy toy construction.** When buying a soft toy or stuffed animal, make sure the eyes, the nose, and any other small parts are secured tightly, or better yet sewn in features. Make sure it is machine washable. Check to see that seams and edges are secure. Avoid toys containing small bean-like pellets or stuffing that can cause choking or suffocation if swallowed.
- 5. Remove loose ribbons or strings to avoid strangulation.** These items can easily become tangled around your child's neck and strangle her. Dangling objects such as crib mobiles can be deadly if your child becomes entangled in them. Loose or long pieces of clothing, such as hood cords, can also strangle your child when the cords get tangled or caught on playground equipment. Strings or cords tied to pacifiers have been involved in numerous strangulation deaths in young children as well.
- 6. Watch out for sharp points or edges** and toys made from thin plastic or other material that may break easily. Don't buy toys with metal parts for a baby or toddler.
- 7. Avoid toxic items and materials** that could cause poisoning. Small batteries are not only toxic, they also can pose a choking or swallowing hazard.
- 8. Electric toys should be "UL Approved".** Check the label to make sure the Underwriters Laboratories approve the toy. Even if the label on a toy says it is UL-approved, burns and shocks can still result from frayed cords, misuse, or prolonged use of the toy.
- 9. Be careful when buying crib toys.** Strings or wires that hang in a crib should be kept short. They may pose a serious strangulation hazard when a child begins to crawl or stand. Remove crib gyms and mobiles as soon as your child can push up on her hands and knees.
- 10. Choose a toy chest carefully.** Look for smooth, finished edges that are nontoxic. If it has a lid, make sure it is sturdy, with locking supports and safe hinges. Toy chests can pinch, bruise, or break tiny fingers and hands if a lid closes suddenly. It should stay open in any position and hinges should not pinch your child's skin. The chest should also have ventilation holes to prevent suffocation if your child becomes trapped inside. The best toy chest is a box, laundry basket, or bin without a lid.

Supervise your child's play

Injuries often occur when there is no proper supervision. Young children are more interested in having fun than in safety. As a result, improper play could lead to a serious toy-related injury. Proper supervision and teaching safe play are very important. Always supervise your child.

- Keep all toys with small parts away from your young child until she learns not to put them in her mouth, usually by about the age of 5 years.
- Do not allow your child to play with a toy that was intended for an older child. Watch older children too, as they might put things in a smaller child's mouth.
- Keep uninflated and broken balloons away from children of all ages, as they are a serious choking hazard. When a child tries to inflate a balloon, he can easily inhale it. Also, never allow a child to place an inflated balloon in his mouth.
- To prevent injuries, stop reckless or improper play. Make sure your child never plays with toys near stairs, traffic, or swimming pools.

Store toys properly

- Store toys on a shelf or in a toy chest. They should be out of the way and off the floor, to avoid being stepped on or tripped over. A toy designed for an older child should be stored far out of reach of a curious toddler.
- Never store a toy in its original packaging. Staples can cause cuts and plastic wrap can lead to choking or suffocation. To avoid injuries, immediately discard toy packaging before giving a new toy to your baby or toddler.

Keep toys in good condition

- Make sure you examine toys regularly. Look for damaged or broken parts that may pose a hazard. Look for splinters on wooden toys, loose eyes or small parts on dolls, rips or exposed wires in stuffed animals, or rust on metal toys.
- Never leave metal toys outside overnight. Rain, snow, or even dew may cause them to rust. Repair or replace any broken parts.
- If you're ever in doubt about a toy's safety, throw it away.

Appropriate Toys and Toys to Avoid

Age-appropriate toys

The following is a list of toys that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends. Use these recommendations when shopping for toys. Keep in mind, these are only guidelines. All toys can be dangerous when they are not used properly or are in poor condition. Parents should continue to watch out for mislabeled toys and always provide proper supervision for young children.

Choose brightly-colored, lightweight toys that appeal to your baby's sight, hearing, and touch.

1. Cloth, plastic, or board books with large pictures
2. Large blocks of wood or plastic
3. Pots and pans
4. Rattles
5. Soft, washable animals, dolls, or balls
6. Bright, movable objects that are out of baby's reach
7. Floating bath toys
8. Squeeze toys

Toys to avoid

Infants and toddlers should never be given toys with the following:

- Parts that could pull off and/or fit into a child's mouth, nose, or ear
- Exposed wires and parts that get hot
- Lead paint
- Toxic materials
- Breakable parts
- Sharp points or edges
- Glass or thin parts
- Springs, gears, or hinged parts that could pinch tiny fingers or become caught in your child's hair

To check whether a toy is unsafe or has been recalled or to report a toy-related injury, call the Consumer Product Safety Commission at 800/638-2772 or visit their Web site at www.cpsc.gov

Age recommendations

Age recommendations printed on toy packages *are* very important. They reflect the safety of a toy based on four categories. These include:

- The safety aspects of the toy and any possible choking hazards
- The physical ability of the child to play with the toy
- The ability of a child to understand how to use a toy
- The needs and interests at various levels of a child's development

These recommendations are based on general developmental levels of each age group. However, every child is different. What is right for one child may not suit the skills and needs of another. Match the toy to your child's abilities. A toy that is too advanced or too simple for your child may be misused, which could lead to an injury.