

Toy Safety

Part I Guidelines for Parents



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. 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.

How children are injured

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. Some common causes of injury are:

- **Abuse and misuse of toys.** Throwing toys, jumping on them, or taking them apart can be dangerous. When a toy breaks, sharp or pointed edges may be exposed that can cause a serious injury. Something as innocent as a doll or teddy bear may quickly become a hazard when your child pulls off an eye, removes a button, or exposes a sharp edge.
- **Small, loose, or broken toys and parts.** A small toy or part can easily become lodged in a child's ear, nose, or throat. Children can be seriously injured or killed from inhaling, swallowing, or choking on objects such as marbles, small balls, toy parts, or balloons. Small toys and parts intended for older children are also involved in choking deaths among toddlers.
- **Loose string, rope, ribbons, or cord.** 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.
- **Toy guns.** Eye injuries often result from toys that shoot plastic objects or other flying pieces. Arrows, darts, or pellets can also be choking hazards. Very loud snapping or machine-gun noises can damage hearing. "Caps" are a hazard when used indoors or closer than 12 inches from your child's ear.
- **Riding Toys.** Injuries are caused not only when children fall off riding toys, but also when they ride them in the street when traffic is present or into swimming pools, ponds, and lakes.
- **Beach and pool toys** are usually not approved flotation devices. Never leave your child unattended at any time near a pool, beach, or pond. It only takes a few moments for a child to drown, even in very shallow water.
- **Electric plug-in toys.** 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.
- **Chemistry sets and hobby kits.** These kits can cause fires, explosions, or poisoning. They may contain chemicals that are often poisonous if swallowed, and they can catch fire or explode, causing serious burns and eye injuries.

- **Toy chests and other storage containers.** Toy chests can pinch, bruise, or break tiny fingers and hands if a lid closes suddenly. Death can even occur when a heavy lid without a safety support hinge traps and strangles a small child. Your child can also suffocate if trapped inside a toy chest. Open containers without lids are safest for toy storage.

Although children may like to play by themselves, 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.

A word about...toy guns

It has been shown that toy guns can cause serious or fatal injuries to children. This is especially true for pellet and BB guns. Although these are often thought of as toys, they can be high-powered, lethal devices. Parents should also be aware that studies in recent years have raised questions about the effect playing with toy firearms has on a child's developing personality. Playing with toy weapons and firearms may cause more aggressive, violent behavior in some children. Playing with toy firearms may also make it easier for a child to mistake a real firearm for a toy.

Tips for buying toys

Use the following guidelines to choose safe and 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 shoot small objects into the air.** They can cause serious eye injuries or choking.
4. **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.
5. **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. Make sure it is machine washable. Check to see that seams and edges are secure. Remove loose ribbons or strings to avoid strangulation. Avoid toys containing small bean-like pellets or stuffing that can cause choking or suffocation if swallowed.

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.

- 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.
- Teaching your child to pick up and put toys away will help her learn to become responsible for her belongings.
- 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.

Playtime should be fun...and safe

Playing with toys is an important part of your child's development and growth. Choosing toys carefully will assure that playtime is educational, fun, and, most importantly, safe. By using the guidelines listed above, you can help prevent toy-related injuries. If you're not sure about a toy's safety or proper use, call the manufacturer. Your child's pediatrician can also help you decide which toys are safe and appropriate for your infant, toddler, or young child.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

How to prevent toy injuries

Use the following guidelines to keep your child safe:

Supervise your child's play

Injuries can happen despite your best efforts to choose the safest toy for your child. Supervision is the best way to prevent injuries.

- 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.

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 57,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.
American Academy of Pediatrics
PO Box 747
Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0747
Web site — <http://www.aap.org>

Copyright ©1994, Updated 12/98 American Academy of Pediatrics