

December is safe toys and gifts month

(KLZA)-- It's the holiday season, which means toy-sharing and gift-giving are in full swing. But before any child receives a new toy, it's important to stop and consider if it is safe and age appropriate. Unfortunately, thousands of children are hurt or even killed each year due to an interaction with an unsafe or developmentally inappropriate toy. December is known as Safe Toys and Gifts Month in order to create a happy, healthy, and safe gift-giving experience for all involved. More than 217,000 children are treated in emergency rooms annually for toy-related injuries, either because of the toy itself or due to its mishandling.

The Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) reported that in 2018 there were 17 toy-related fatalities. Most of the injuries (72%) involved children under the age of 15, and most of the fatalities were caused by automobiles and non-motorized scooters. Other deaths were caused by airway obstruction such as rubber balls, balloons, toy darts, toy food, and stuffed dolls. Last was drownings and electrocutions. It is estimated that an average of 11,000 toy-related eye injuries occur in children each year, with the majority coming from BB guns and other weapon-related toys. Bungee cords, used for purposes such as securing items to bikes, are another leading cause of eye injuries. Sports equipment may cause some hazards, so it is wise to make sure proper protective eyewear is worn when engaging in sports. Toys with rubber bands can also cause eye injuries.

In recent years, CPSC has created a robust toy safety system that requires testing by independent, third-party testing laboratories around the world. Toymakers have also helped in improving safety by willingly recalling products across the globe when safety concerns arise, such as the presence of lead paint and small magnets. However, shoppers still need to take precautions. Faulty design isn't the sole cause of injuries; usage plays a role as well in injuries and/or deaths. Buying toys and other gifts are one of the most exciting parts of the holiday season, so before making any purchases this year, keep safety in mind so the holidays don't turn from the happiest time of the year to the scariest.

To keep your child safe this holiday season, inspect toys before purchasing. Look for sharp points, edges, and parts that can fly off. Check for durability should a child attempt to break, crush, or pull toys apart; do not give toys with ropes, cords, or heating elements. Make sure crayons and markers are labeled "nontoxic." Finally, it is important to NEVER give small toys with removable magnets or "button" batteries. These can cause serious injury or even death if ingested.

Keep in mind the child's age and development level (most toys offer an age range

for guidance) when giving toys. If shopping for infants and children with special needs, look for toys that appeal to the senses (sound, light, movement, texture, etc.). Keep toys that are appropriate for older children away from younger siblings. Remember the rule that if the piece can fit in a toilet paper roll, it is not meant for children under 3 years of age.

Most riding-toy injuries are from falls. Children fall off their bikes, scooters, skateboards, and in-line skates often, especially if they are inexperienced, resulting in cuts, scrapes, bruises, bone fractures, and severe head injuries. Children are also at risk of falling from treehouses and swing sets and other playground equipment. The best way to prevent an injury from a fall is proper padding, using kneepads, elbow pads, and helmets.

Choking is one of the most common toy-related injuries. A child's trachea is extremely narrow, so even the tiniest of pieces from a toy can block a child's airway and cause suffocation, which is the fourth leading cause of unintentional deaths in children under five years old. Toy manufacturers are required to put warnings on labels for choking hazards, so always inspect a toy before allowing a child to play with it. Children can choke or suffocate on deflated or broken balloons. Keep deflated balloons away from children younger than eight years old; discard broken balloons immediately. Once gifts are opened, immediately discard plastic wrapping or other toy packaging before the wrapping and packaging become dangerous playthings.

Battery charging should be supervised by adults; chargers and adapters can pose thermal burn hazards to young children. Pay attention to instructions and warnings on battery chargers, as some chargers lack any mechanism to prevent overcharging.

Share your knowledge about unsafe toys. The CPSC provides free safety alerts, guides, posters, brochures, handbooks, and other materials that can be used to help spread consumer product safety information in your community. For more information, visit <https://www.cpsc.gov/>

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