You may feel a lot of pressure from your kids to buy them the latest toys that have hit the stores. But, consider these safety tips before you go on your next shopping trip!

**Buying Toys**

**Choosing Toys With Care**

Keep in mind the child's age, interests, and skill level. Look for quality design and construction in all toys for all ages.

**Reading the Label**

Pay attention to the age recommendations, such as "not recommended for children under three." In addition, look for other safety labels including, like "flame retardant/flame resistant" on fabric products and "washable/hygienic materials" on stuffed toys and dolls.

**Making Sure the Directions Are Clear**

Directions should be clear to you and, when appropriate, to your child. Plastic wrappings on toys should be discarded at once before they become dangerous play things.

**Bringing the Toys Home**

**Being Aware of Potential Hazards**

**Cords and Strings**

Toys with long strings or cords may be dangerous for infants and very young children. The cords may become wrapped around an infant's neck, causing strangulation. Never hang toys with long strings, cords, loops, or ribbons in cribs or playpens where children can become entangled. Remove crib gyms from the crib when the child can pull up on hands and knees.

**Small Parts**

Toys can break to reveal parts small enough to be swallowed or to become lodged in a child's windpipe, ears, or nose. The law bans small parts in new toys intended for children under three. This includes removable small eyes and noses on stuffed toys and dolls, as well as small, removable squeakers on squeeze toys.

Toys for infants, like squeeze toys or teethers, should be large enough so that they cannot enter and become lodged in an infant's throat.

**Sharp Points**
Broken toys may have dangerous points or prongs. Stuffed toys may have wires inside the toy that could cut or stab if exposed. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) prohibits sharp points in toys intended for use by children under eight years of age.

Propelled Objects

Projectiles—guided missiles and similar flying toys—can be turned into weapons and can injure eyes. Children should never be permitted to play with adult lawn darts or other hobby or sporting equipment that have sharp points. Arrows or darts used by children should have soft cork tips, rubber suction cups, or other protective tips intended to prevent injury. Check to be sure the tips are secure. Avoid dart guns or other toys that might be capable of firing articles not intended for use in the toy, such as pencils or nails.

Electric Toys

Electric toys that are improperly constructed, wired, or misused can shock or burn. Electric toys must meet mandatory requirements for maximum surface temperatures and electrical construction. Electric toys with heating elements are recommended only for children over eight years old. Children should be taught to use electric toys properly and only under adult supervision.

Loud Noises

Toy caps and some noisemaking guns and other toys can produce sounds at noise levels that can damage hearing. The law requires the following label on boxes of caps producing noise above a certain level: "WARNING—Do not fire closer than one foot to the ear. Do not use indoors." Caps producing noise that can injure a child's hearing are banned.

Maintaining Toys

Check all toys periodically for breakage and potential hazards. A damaged or dangerous toy should be thrown away or repaired right away. And don't forget to check outdoor toys! Examine these regularly for rust or weak parts that could become hazardous.

Storing Toys

Teach children to put their toys safely away on shelves or in a toy chest after playing to prevent trips and falls. Toy boxes, too, should be checked for safety. Use a toy chest that has a lid that will stay open in any position to which it is raised and will not fall unexpectedly on a child. For extra safety, be sure there are ventilation holes for fresh air. Watch for sharp edges that could cut and hinges that could pinch or squeeze. See that toys used outdoors are also stored after play.

Playing It Safe

Keep toys designed for older children out of the hands of little ones. Follow labels that give age recommendations. Some toys are recommended for older children because they may be hazardous in the hands of a younger child. Teach older children to help keep their toys away from younger brothers and sisters. Even a balloon, when deflated or broken, can choke or suffocate a child if he tries to swallow it.

Your Responsibility

Protecting children from unsafe toys is everyone's responsibility. Careful toy selection and proper supervision of children at play is still—and always will be—the best way to protect children from toy-related injuries.

To report a product hazard or a product-related injury, visit the Consumer Product Safety Commission's website.

RESOURCES:

Consumer Product Safety Commission
http://www.cpsc.gov/

WATCH
http://www.toysafety.org/

CANADIAN RESOURCES:

Child & Family Canada
http://www.cfc-efc.ca/

Health Canada
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/index_e.html/

REFERENCE:


Last reviewed December 2011 by Brian Randall, MD
Last Updated: 12/14/2011