Some things to consider to keep toys safe for children

Posted by Dr. Gary A. Smith/Ohio State University December 17, 2008 00:00AM

Categories: Impact, Netwellness

For children, toys and fun go hand in hand. But some toys can pose dangers, and it is important for parents to consider carefully what their children play with.

In 2007, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimated that there were about 170,100 toy-related injuries to children under the age of 15 treated in hospital emergency departments. Most of these incidents involved cuts, eye injuries, and bruises.

Toys have also caused death among children, including airway blockage from small toys, drowning, and motor vehicle-related injuries during play.

Take Precautions

The holiday season is a good time to take stock of the toys your children have. You should also consider the following guidelines suggested by Prevent Blindness America before purchasing new toys:

• Read all warnings and instructions on the box.
• Make sure the toy is appropriate for your child's age and ability.
• Avoid toys with sharp points, spikes, rods, or dangerous edges.
• Buy toys that can withstand impact and will not break into jagged pieces.
• Look for the letters "ASTM" on the toy or box to ensure that the product meets safety standards set by the American Society for Testing and Materials.
• Avoid toys that shoot or include parts that fly off.

In addition, specific toys are frequently associated with toy-related injuries:

• Bicycles, scooters, skateboards, in-line skates, riding toys - Falls and crashes can be deadly. Helmets and safety gear should be sized to fit and worn at all times.
• Marbles, small balls, and small parts - Children under 3 years old should not have access to toys with small pieces because of the choking hazard.
• Balloons - Children under 8 years old should not play with latex balloons. They can choke or suffocate on un-inflated or broken balloons. Pick up and discard broken balloons immediately.
• Magnets - Children under 6 years old should avoid playing with small magnets. Swallowing magnets can cause serious injuries and even death.
• Chargers and adapters - Children should not have access to charging batteries because the chargers and adapters can cause burns.

What You Can Do

After children have opened new toys, immediately remove the plastic packaging to prevent suffocation. Cords and strings should also be kept out of reach because of
the risk of strangulation. Children will often try to play with anything they can reach if you let them.

You should also inspect toys for quality and durability and explain to your child how the toy is to be used.

Supervise children when they play. Even a quiet activity such as a craft that involves scissors, glue, and markers has the potential for injury.

When children are done playing, make sure everything is picked up and put away to avoid tripping or falling on objects.

Recalls

Toys are sometimes recalled for safety concerns. Information about recalled toys and other products is posted at Recalls.gov. If you discover that a toy you own has been recalled, return it to the manufacturer or throw it away.

Do not try to fix it, keep it, or give it away.

Paint and plastic parts of toys can include lead, particularly if they are manufactured outside of the United States. Because children like to put toys in their mouths, this can be a source of lead exposure, which can cause very serious health problems.

Check the Recalls.gov website to find out about recalls of toys with lead.

By taking these precautions and being aware of risks, toys will remain a fun part of the holiday season.

Additional toy and other safety tips are available on the website of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children’s Hospital.