

A Parent's Guide to Toy Safety



Children can have a lot of fun playing with their toys. However, it's important to keep in mind that safety should always come first. Each year thousands of children are injured by toys.

Read on to learn what to look for when buying toys and how a few simple ideas for safe use can often prevent injuries.

How to prevent injuries

Most injuries from toys are minor cuts, scrapes, and bruises. However, toys can cause serious injury or even death. This happens when toys are dangerous or used in the wrong way. The following are ways to help prevent injuries:

Supervise your child's play

- **Do not allow reckless or improper play.** Injuries can happen when toys are thrown, jumped on, or taken apart.
- **Watch out for small, loose, or broken toys.** A small toy or part can easily get stuck in a child's ear, nose, or throat. Children can be seriously injured or killed from inhaling, swallowing, or choking on objects such as magnets, marbles, small balls, toy parts, or balloons. Keep all toys with small parts away from your child until she learns not to do this, usually by about 5 years of age.
- **Watch your child carefully around balloons.** Uninflated and broken balloons are a serious choking hazard. Your child can easily inhale the balloon when she tries to inflate it. Or if she tries to bite the balloon and it bursts, she can swallow the broken pieces.
- **Always check the batteries.** If a toy has small batteries, be sure the battery compartment is sealed tightly so your child cannot get them out. Small batteries are a choking hazard.
- **Watch out for loose strings, ropes, ribbons, or cords.** These can get tangled around a child's neck. They are often found in crib toys; on pull toys; on clothing, such as hood cords; or tied to pacifiers.
- **Have a safe play area for riding toys.** Injuries can happen when children fall off riding toys or play with them in or near the street or near swimming pools, ponds, and lakes. Other riding toys such as skateboards, scooters, and in-line skates go fast, and falls could be deadly. Be sure your child wears a helmet and safety gear when using these toys.

Keep toys in good condition

- **Repair or replace any broken parts.** Look for damaged or broken parts, splinters on wooden toys, loose eyes or small parts on dolls, and exposed wires on electric toys. A broken toy can expose sharp or pointed edges.
- **Don't let toys get rusty.** Never leave metal toys outside overnight, as they may get rusty.
- **Check for fire hazards.** Burns and shocks can result from frayed cords, misuse, or overuse of electric plug-in toys.

Store toys properly

- **Store toys on a shelf or in a toy chest.** Toys should be out of the way and off the floor to avoid being stepped on or tripped over. Also, choose a toy chest carefully. Toy chests can pinch, bruise, or break tiny fingers and hands if they close suddenly. Children can also suffocate if they get trapped inside a toy chest. The best toy chest is a box or basket without a lid. However, if it has a lid, make sure it has safe hinges that hold the lid open and do not pinch. The chest should also have air holes just in case your child gets trapped inside.
- **Keep toys made for an older child far out of reach of a younger child.** These toys may have small parts or be harmful in other ways.
- **Never store a toy in its original package.** Staples and stiff plastic containers can cause cuts, and plastic wrap can lead to choking or suffocation.

How to buy a safe toy

Here are 10 tips to help you choose safe and appropriate toys for your child.

1. **Read the label.** Warning labels give important information about how to use a toy and what ages the toy is safe for. Be sure to show your child how to use the toy the right way.
2. **Think LARGE.** Make sure all toys and parts are larger than your child's mouth to prevent choking.
3. **Avoid toys that shoot objects into the air.** They can cause serious eye injuries or choking.
4. **Avoid toys that are loud** to prevent damage to your child's hearing.
5. **Look for stuffed toys that are well made.** Make sure all the parts are on tight and seams and edges are secure. It should also be machine washable. Take off any loose ribbons or strings to avoid strangulation. Avoid toys that have small bean-like pellets or stuffing that can cause choking or suffocation if swallowed.
6. **Buy plastic toys that are sturdy.** Toys made from thin plastic may break easily.
7. **Avoid toys with toxic materials that could cause poisoning.** Make sure the label says "nontoxic."
8. **Avoid hobby kits and chemistry sets for any child younger than 12 years.** They can cause fires or explosions and may contain dangerous chemicals. Make sure your older child knows how to safely handle these kinds of toys.
9. **Electric toys should be "UL Approved."** Check the label to be sure.
10. **Be careful when buying crib toys.** Strings or wires that hang in a crib should be kept short to avoid strangulation. Crib toys should be removed as soon as your child can push up on his hands and knees.

Gift ideas by age

Age recommendations on toys can be helpful because they offer guidelines on the following:

- The safety of the toy (for example, if there any possible choking hazards)
- The ability of a 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.

The following is a list of toys that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends for specific age groups. Keep in mind, these are only guidelines. Parents should continue to watch out for mislabeled toys and always supervise young children.

Young infants (birth–6 months old)

Toys for this age are for looking, sucking, listening, and touching.

- Mobiles or hanging toys that are out of baby's reach
- Rattles they can easily hold or shake
- Soft squeeze balls
- Large unbreakable mirrors mounted on a crib or wall

Older infants (7–12 months old)

Toys for this age group should appeal to your baby's sight, hearing, and touch.

- Cloth, plastic, or board books with large pictures
- Large blocks (wood or plastic)
- Soft, washable animals, dolls, or balls
- Activity boards and cubes
- Floating bath toys
- Squeeze and squeak toys
- Disks or keys on rings
- Stacking toys

Toddlers (1 to 2 years old)

Toys for this age group should be able to withstand a toddler's curious nature.

- Cloth, plastic, or board books with large pictures
- Sturdy dolls
- Stuffed toys (no small or removable parts)
- Ride-on toys (no pedals)
- Rhythm instruments like bells, drums, cymbals, and xylophones
- Nesting and stacking blocks
- Push and pull toys (no long strings)
- Toy phones (no cords)
- Hidden object or pop-up toys
- Matching and sorting games

Preschoolers (3 to 5 years old)

Toys for this age group can be creative or imitate the activity of parents and older children.

- Books (short or action stories)
- Simple board games
- Building blocks
- Crayons, nontoxic paints, clay, chalk
- Toy tools
- Housekeeping toys
- Ride-on toys (tricycles, cars, wagons)
- Number and letter puzzles with large pieces
- Dress-up clothes
- Tea party sets

6- to 9-year-olds

Toys for this age group should help your child develop new skills and creativity.

- Crafts or sewing sets
- Card games
- Doctor and nurse kits
- Hand puppets
- Table games
- Electric trains
- Paper dolls
- Bicycles with helmets
- Roller skates or in-line skates with protective gear
- Other sports equipment like balls or jump ropes

10- to 14-year-olds

Hobbies and scientific activities are ideal for this age group.

- Computer games (Check the ratings on computer games to be sure they are OK for your child.)
- Sewing, knitting, needlework
- Microscopes/telescopes
- Table and board games
- Sports equipment
- Hobby collections

How safe are toy guns?

It has been shown that toy guns can cause serious or deadly 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, deadly devices. Parents should also be aware that studies in recent years have raised questions about the effect playing with toy guns has on a child's developing personality. Playing with toy weapons and guns may cause more aggressive, violent behavior in some children. Playing with toy guns may also make it easier for a child to mistake a real gun for a toy.

For more information

If you're not sure about a toy's safety or proper use, call the manufacturer. To check whether a toy is unsafe or to report a toy-related injury, call the Consumer Product Safety Commission at 800/638-2772 or visit its Web site at www.cpsc.gov.

Important information about recalled toys

One of the goals of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is to protect consumers and families from dangerous toys. It sets up rules and guidelines to ensure products are safe and issues recalls of products if a problem is found. Toys are recalled for various reasons including unsafe lead levels, choking or fire hazards, or other problems that make them dangerous. Toys that are recalled should be removed right away. If you think your child has been exposed to a toy containing lead, ask your child's doctor about testing for elevated blood lead levels.

If you are not sure about the safety of a toy or want to know if a toy has been recalled, see the CPSC Web site (www.cpsc.gov) for photos and descriptions of all recalled toys.

Please note: Listing of resources does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned in this publication. Phone numbers and Web site addresses are as current as possible, but may change at any time.

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From your doctor

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