



## Safe Toys for the Holidays

In 1999, more than 3.8 billion toys and games were sold in our country.

Poor selection of toys and lack of parental supervision contributes to a wide variety of injuries to children and can lead to injury-related deaths. In 1999, hospital emergency rooms across the country treated an estimated 118,300 children ages 14 and under for toy-related injuries and at least 16 children ages 11 and under died from toy-related injuries. Children under age four are particularly at high risk of being injured while playing with toys and account for 60 percent of the children with toy-related injuries. The total annual cost of toy-related injuries treated in hospital emergency rooms nationwide for children ages four and under is approximately \$385 million.

Choking is the most common type of toy injury, but children playing with toys also are injured through falls, strangulation, burns, drowning, and poisoning. Most injuries to children playing with toys are minor and can be prevented through responsible choices by adults and proper supervision during play. Marketing, promotional campaigns, and the wishes of children can be powerful influences on which toys to purchase. Instead, when preparing shopping lists for children's toys during the holidays, consider these guidelines for toy safety as a primary influence for your purchases:

- Select toys that match a child's age, stage of development, interests, and skill level.

Follow age and safety recommendations on labels.

- Look for these toy safety hazards:
  - sharp edges or corners
  - projectile parts that can hurt eyes
  - plastic, brittle, or glass products
  - staples or pins in stuffed toys
  - toy boxes with lids (entrapment hazard)
  - toys with strings and cords (strangulation hazard)
  - flammable materials such as hair on dolls
  - electric toys or toys that heat up
- Are parts removable? Are any parts small enough to put in a child's mouth? If part fits in a 35 mm plastic film canister, the piece is too small for young children to be handling.
- Know the history of second-hand toys.
- Establish ground rules for toy gun play, making certain children understand differences between toy guns and real guns.
- Check battery operated toys to make sure batteries have not burst or leaked.
- Do not purchase latex balloons for children. The leading cause of toy-related death in children is choking, mostly on latex balloons. Use mylar balloons, instead, for children.

Close supervision of children is critical to assuring their safety with toys. Do not leave children unattended during play time. Children's natural curiosity may lead them to swallow toy parts or to use the toy in a manner that is not intended. Take time to teach young children to check with an adult before ever putting anything into their mouths. Look for opportunities to teach children the importance of sharing with others and taking turns.

For more information about toy safety and selection, contact Riley Hospital's Community Education Department at 317-274-2964 or visit <http://www.rileyforkids.org/>