

There are thousands of toys on store shelves to choose from, but making sure a toy is safe and age appropriate for a child is well worth the search to prevent injury or even death.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, in 2010, there were an estimated 140,700 emergency room treated injuries related to toys among children. Strict safety standards are regulated through the CPSC requiring toy manufacturers to label certain toys that could be hazardous to young children, and provide a recommended age of child to be using the toy. But it is up to the purchaser to ensure the toy is safe and the correct age level for the child.

There are some guidelines that shoppers should follow to keep children safe during their playtime. Remember though; parents should use their own judgment as they know the child's maturity level and can best decide if the toy is suitable or not.

Top Toys to Take into Consideration

Non-motorized scooters and riding toys—riding toys, skateboards, and even shoes with wheels go fast and falls could easily cause injury at any age. Helmets and safety gear, including elbow and knee pads, should be worn properly at all times and be sized to fit the child.

Small balls, coins and toys with small parts—government regulations specify that toys for children under the age of three cannot have parts less than 1 1/4 inches in diameter and 2 1/4 inches long as these small objects can pose a choking risk. Any ball with a diameter of 1 1/4 inches or less should not be given to a young child.

Balloons—deflated or broken balloons are another choking risk. Deflated balloons should be kept away from children younger than eight years old and broken balloons and the balloon string should be immediately discarded.

Art materials – crayons, paint and other art items should not be given to children under the age of three. Make sure art supplies are non-toxic and marked ASTM D-4236 to indicate the product has been reviewed by the American Society for Testing and Materials. Products that conform to D-4236 have been tested for toxicity. However, this does not mean they are non-toxic, but rather any toxins contained within the product are listed on the packaging.

Chargers, batteries and adapters – these items can pose electrical and burn dangers to children of all ages. Special attention should be given to instructions and warnings for these items. Some chargers also lack mechanisms to prevent overcharging so do not leave the home when charging.

Play swords, guns and other weapons – these toys should be given only to mature, grade school age children. They should be bright colors so they are easily differentiated from real weapons and should not be sharp or come to a point.

Flying toys – Toys that are meant to be airborne can result in serious eye or head injury if not used properly. It is recommended that children under eight not play with projectile toys.

Shopping Tips

- Be aware of the store where toys are purchased. Second hand stores and yard sales can be spend-savvy places, but second hand toys may be broken or defective, becoming dangerous. Also, without original packaging, age guidelines and warning are not available. Examine each toy carefully looking for cracks, paint chippings or even leaking battery fluid.

- Be aware of what toys are made of as some products have dangerous substances that can be harmful when ingested.

- For toys that produce sound, look for toys that have a volume level to protect children's hearing. A noise rating may also be listed on the product. If there is not a rating listed, contact the toy manufacturer and request this information. An extremely loud toy for children is 90 decibel.

Remind children to properly put away their toys because if they are left out, they can become a tripping hazard for everyone. Proper supervision of children at play will also result in a safer playtime.

Consumers can find up-to-date toy recalls and report dangerous toys and injuries caused by a toy on the CPSC website, www.cpsc.gov/.