

Don't "Toy Around" with Safety: Make toy safety a top priority this holiday season

There are few holiday activities more fun than buying toys for the children we love. Watching their faces light up is even better and makes us feel a bit like kids again ourselves.

But before you head out to shop with those wish lists in hand, it's important to pay attention to a word that pops up on many toy packages: caution.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), an estimated 254,200 toy-related injuries were treated in U.S. hospital emergency departments in 2015. And an estimated 73 percent of those happened to children younger than 15 years of age.

"Accidents like these put an unwanted and unnecessary spin on holiday celebrations," says Amy Evers, Emergency Department Director at Valley View Medical Center. "But the good news is that these injuries are preventable. Keeping a few important safety considerations in mind when shopping for toys can help to keep your celebrations joyful and safe for everyone."

Below are a few important toy safety tips to keep in mind before you spend your cash.

Avoid toys with small parts. As toddlers are drawn to putting objects in their ears, noses and mouths, toys containing small parts should be kept away from children three years and younger. A good rule of thumb: if a toy part can fit through an empty toilet paper roll, it's a bad idea for the young ones.

Check for sturdiness. Many a toy can attest to the fact that children are often anything *but* gentle with the things they own. Look for quality design and construction in toys for all ages. Only buy those toys that appear durable and have the ability to withstand impact and/or chewing without breaking or splintering.

Check noise levels. While toys that play music and talk are educational and exciting for children under five, many have the decibel level of car horns and can cause ear damage. Check to make sure the toy's noise is at a safe level before you buy. (Your eardrums – and nerves – will thank you, too.)

Check for recalls. Thanks to the very high standards that toys are held to in the U.S., toy recalls are somewhat rare these days. Still, some products can fall through the cracks, so it's important to review the latest recall list from the CPSC. You can check the latest recalls at <https://www.cpsc.gov/recalls>.

Think before you buy. Toys with strings longer than 12 inches can be a strangulation hazard, and projectile toys that fly or shoot can lead to eye damage. Thinking of the worst case scenario before you buy can help prevent you from living it later.

Don't forget the safety gear. Make sure to add on any gear necessary to safely enjoy toys and gifts. For example, protective gear should always accompany all types of riding toys, from harnesses for rocking horses to helmets for bikes.

Read the labels. Most toys for children under 12 should have the appropriate age range printed on them. And if a toy for older children has a "supervision required" label, just make sure you're willing to take on that responsibility before purchasing. If you're not, it's a good idea to put it back on the shelf.

Seeing the joy on the faces of the children you love is one of the season's special highlights. Following these safety tips when shopping can help ensure that their – and your – holidays stay safe and happy.

For more information on toy safety and the latest recalls, visit <http://www.cpsc.gov>.