

WHY LOOK FOR SAFER TOYS?

Toys play an important role in helping children to learn and develop, however they can also pose an injury risk.

The most common cause of injuries is falls from toys, or falls onto toys or items such as toy boxes. Injuries also occur when children collide with, or are struck by a toy. Toy related injuries usually involve balls, ride-on toys and bicycles, toy boxes, and transport toys such as planes and trucks.

In 2009 Consumer Affairs Victoria seized over 30,000 unsafe toys from shelves in Victoria, as they contained a range of potential hazards including: choking, strangulation, lead exposure, and cutting/piercing hazards which had the potential to cause serious injuries. The number of toys seized highlights the need for parents and carers to carefully select toys for children, always taking into consideration the safety and age appropriateness of the toy. Just because a toy is for sale on the shelf, does not mean that it is automatically safe for children.

A high proportion of all toys sold in Australia are sold in the last quarter of the year- the lead up to Christmas.

There are simple, commonsense guidelines to follow when choosing toys for children that will help identify items that might be dangerous.

TODDLERS MOST AT RISK

Toddlers begin to explore, move about and play more, exposing them to more risk factors. Children aged 3 years old are most at risk accounting for 22% of injuries. Following close behind are the 2 year old age group (20%) and 4 year olds (19%). The majority of injuries happen in the home.

WHY TOY INJURIES OCCUR

Toys are involved in child injuries for a variety of reasons. They may be:

- inherently dangerous; explosive or projectile toys have inherent dangers because of what they are designed to do.
- badly made; toys may be poorly constructed, and break easily during normal play.
- have built in hazards; toys may have design faults that are dangerous- sharp edges that cause cuts, small parts that easily



break off and are choking hazards, or moving parts with the potential to pinch and crush fingers.

- dangerous for the wrong age group or size; toys are graded for particular ages. This is associated with a child's development and enjoyment. Toys that are safe for one age group may be dangerous for others.
- used incorrectly; toys assembled or being used incorrectly are common causes of injury.

COMMON TOY INJURIES

Children under 5:

- took out and swallowed toy batteries;
- put small piece of lego up his nose;
- riding tricycle and could not stop, fell onto concrete;
- fell down, hitting head on toy box;
- fell backwards off ride-on toy, hit head;
- looking at toy, pulled trigger, hit in eye;
- fell over, sharp part of toy went through roof of mouth;
- playing, fell onto sharp toy.

Aged 5-9 years:

- riding scooter, caught toe in spokes;
- tripped over pull-along toy, hit head on tiled floor;
- wire from toy stuck in finger;
- caught finger in toy box;
- fell from climbing frame;
- poked plastic toy in ear;
- fell off roof of cubby house;
- swallowed marble.

10-15 years:

- wrestling with sister, hit knee on sharp edge of toy box;
- tried to jump on moving 3-wheel bike, landed on cross bar;
- playing with rubber dart gun, hit in eye;
- fell out of billy-cart, leg dragged under.

BUYING SAFER TOYS

- **Take notice of the age recommendation.** These are linked to a child's development and to safe use. When buying for an older child, think about a younger child's potential to access the toy. A toy marked as not suitable for a child under 3 years may have small parts which a young child can swallow.
- **Get advice on recommended brands and toys.** Teachers, friends and toy libraries can help in finding appropriate and enjoyable toys and reliable brands.
- **Read the label and instructions.** Check that the toy is non-

toxic, non-flammable, carries an age recommendation, and has the distributors contact details in case there is a problem.

- **Avoid explosive or projectile toys.**
- **Inspect the toy.** Look at the quality of work and for things that might be a danger to your child, including:
 - **Small parts:** anything smaller than a ping pong ball is a choking hazard.
 - **Sharp edges or points.**
 - **Noisy toys:** these can damage hearing.
 - **Long strings or ribbons:** should be no more than 30cm long to minimize the risk of strangulation.
 - **Weak construction:** seams that come apart, or loose pieces such as eyes and buttons are a choking hazard.
 - **Small ends on baby's toys:** these can reach well into the back of a baby's mouth.
 - **Moving parts:** these can trap or pinch small fingers.
- Return faulty toys to retailers.
- Be aware of toy recalls.

WHICH TOYS FOR WHICH AGE?

Age guides for toys are linked to safety and to child development—they are not a measure of intelligence. Although it is tempting to think a child is smart enough for toys suited to an older child, it is safer to follow the age guidelines. The following is a broad guide of what to look for when choosing age-appropriate toys.

Under three years of age:

For children under three, avoid toys with small parts that could separate, sharp edges, strings or cords, or toys that require difficult finger movements. Buy solid, sturdy toys.

Six to twelve months: At this age, the main dangers with toys are choking, poisons and sharp edges because everything is explored by putting it in the mouth. Older children's toys are a particular hazard.

Suitable toys include: bath toys, soft and cuddly toys, soft balls, push and pull toys, strong rattles, simple block and construction puzzles, mobiles- out of reach, and washable squeaky toys.

Twelve months to two years: Children at this age will still put things in their mouth, and are at greater risk of falls. They will have little sense of danger, and so are at high risk of drowning and being run-over.

Suitable toys include: large solid wooden toys, blocks, soft toys, ride-on toys, push and pull toys, washable cloth books, trucks, cars, large coloured balls, and buckets and spades.

Two to three years: At this age, the hazards are the same as for younger ages, but the child can move further and faster. As manual skills increase, exploration still includes placing objects in the mouth.

Suitable toys include: sandpit toys, peg boards, large building blocks, solid construction sets, pull toys, push toys, large non-toxic crayons, small table and chair.

Three to six years

Water hazards still present a danger to children at this age. Parents and carers should still supervise children around water at all times. Children of this age becoming stronger, faster and more physical. Projectile toys present a danger, especially as boys of this age like to throw things.

Three years: Children are more creative and want to explore.

Suitable toys include: non-toxic paints and crayons, blackboard, jigsaws, toy garden tools, tricycle, pedal car, toy trucks and other vehicles, water toys, paddling pool, plastic tea set, broom and carpet sweeper, non-electric trains.

Four years: Children this age loves to explore and find out more about the world, and to mimic others.

Suitable toys include: simple puzzles and games, dress-ups, modelling materials, musical instruments, constructions sets, outdoor play equipment, and pedal powered toys.

Five years: Children are developing better physical co-ordination and language skills.

Suitable toys include: games, story books, doll's prams, jigsaws, paints, clay, outdoor play equipment, colouring books, children's safety scissors.

Six years and over

As children get older, toys tend to become more specific to the interests of the child, and are often more activity based. There will be a need for more difficult and challenging activities; however gifts should still be linked to child development. Sports equipment should be accompanied by appropriate safety gear.

Suitable toys include: board and indoor games, sewing and carpentry sets, word and number games, jigsaws, small bicycles, train sets, sports gear, roller blades, skateboards.

USING TOYS SAFELY

- Always read the instructions carefully, and dispose of packaging carefully.
- Arrange safe places to play. Children and adults falling over scattered toys is the most common form of injury associated with toys. Keep toys off stairs and walkways.
- Keep toys made for older children away from younger children. Toys that are safe for one age group may be dangerous for another.
- Store toys down low so children can reach them easily without climbing. Toy containers that are light, with rounded edges and loose fitting lids are best. Avoid heavy hinges lids that can crush fingers, and large air-tight containers.
- Check the condition of toys as you tidy up. Repair or throw out any that are no longer safe.

