



Feature Column

By Dr. Fay W. Boozman, Director
www.healthyarkansas.com

Keeping Your Hometown Healthy

Make Toy Safety Top on Your Christmas List

December 20 – 27, 2002

Finding the right toy for a child can be a daunting challenge any time of the year but it is even more challenging during the holidays. However, if parents keep their children's age and safety in mind, they can rest assured that their selections will be appropriate for their children's abilities and well-being.

"When buying gifts for children, adults should make safety a priority in their decision," says Virginia Lancaster, coordinator of the Arkansas SAFE KIDS Coalition. "Parents should consider whether the toy is appropriate for the child's age and whether the gift requires protective gear accessories such as helmets and knee pads."

The Arkansas SAFE KIDS Coalition recommends the following precautionary tips when selecting gifts this holiday season:

Select safe toys. In 2000, an estimated 150,800 children ages 14 and under were treated in hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries. Children age four and under accounted for nearly half of these injuries. Innocent-looking toys, such as marbles and balloons, present a choking hazard to small children. The Child Safety Protection Act, a federal toy labeling law, requires manufacturers to place warning labels on toys that pose a choking hazard to young children. Avoid the following:

-more-

- Toys with small removable parts, which can pose a choking hazard to children under age three. Use a small parts tester (which can be purchased at a toy or baby specialty store) to measure the size of the toy or part. If the piece fits entirely inside the tube, then it is considered a choking hazard
- Toys with sharp points or edges
- Toys that produce loud noises
- Propelled toy darts and other projectiles
- Toys with strings, straps or cords longer than seven inches. Long cords could wrap around a child's neck and unintentionally strangle him or her
- Electrical toys, a potential burn hazard
- Toys painted with lead paint - Exposure to lead can result in lead poisoning, causing serious damage to a child's brain, kidneys and nervous system
- Toy cap guns - Paper roll, strip or ring caps can be ignited by the slightest friction and cause serious burns

Follow age recommendations when selecting toys. Many toy-related injuries occur when parents overestimate their child's ability to handle a toy designed for an older age group. Age recommendations for toys not only take into account a child's cognitive abilities, but they also consider the overall safety of a toy.

The Arkansas SAFE KIDS Coalition recommends using the following guidelines for age appropriate toys:

- **Infants 12 months and under** -- The most suitable toys for the first year include activity quilts, stuffed animals without button noses and eyes, bath toys, soft dolls, baby swings,

-more-

cloth books and squeaky toys.

- **Children ages 1 to 3** – The best toys for this age group are books, blocks, fit-together toys, balls, push-and-pull toys, pounding toys and shape toys.
- **Children ages 3 to 5** -- Most suitable toys include approved non-toxic art supplies, books, videos, musical instruments and outdoor toys such as a baseball tee, slide or swing.
- **Children ages 5 to 9** -- Recommended toys include craft materials, jump ropes, puppets, books, electric trains (after age eight) and sports equipment. Remember, children age eight and up can begin to use electrical and battery-operated toys. Check tape recorders and battery-operated toys regularly for loose or exposed wires. Never allow children to change batteries.
- **Children ages 9 to 14** -- Appropriate gifts include computers, microscopes, table and board games and outdoor and team sports equipment. Keep older children's toys out of reach of younger children for whom they may present a danger.

Remember, a gift is not complete unless the proper protective gear is included, such as bicycle helmets, knee and elbow pads, and helmets for skateboards, scooters and in-line skates.

A free brochure on toy safety is available by writing to: Toy Brochure, Arkansas SAFE KIDS Coalition, 4815 West Markham, Slot 17, Little Rock, AR 72205. For more information, contact Virginia Lancaster, coordinator of the Arkansas SAFE KIDS Coalition, Arkansas Department of Health at (501) 661-2278, or visit our Web site at www.healthyarkansas.com. The Arkansas SAFE KIDS Coalition is co-sponsored by the Arkansas Department of Health and Arkansas Children's Hospital.

-###-