Overview

Billions of toys to amuse children of all ages are sold each year in the US. Unfortunately, toys also are associated with thousands of injuries each year, some of which result in death. Children under age 3 are especially at risk for injury from toys. Injuries can range from falling, choking, strangulation, burning, drowning, and even poisoning. However, the leading cause of toy-related death is choking, usually on latex balloons. Injury often results when a toy is misused or used by children who are too young for that particular toy. An example is a toy with small parts, designed for older children, which can cause choking when those small parts are ingested by a curious toddler.

Knowing the dangers associated with certain toys and age groups can help you better protect your child from toy injuries. When selecting toys for your child, consider the following recommendations:

- Choose toys that are age-appropriate and meet your child's skill level and interest (read the toy's labeling).
- Avoid using latex balloons as much as possible and use mylar balloons instead.
- Make sure toys are used in safe environments, such as keeping a riding toy away from stairs.
- Be involved in your child's play.
- Store toys intended for older children separately from toys used by younger children.
- Use a small parts tester to determine which small toys or parts are choking hazards to children under age 3. A small parts tester allows for small objects to be inserted - if the object fits, it is a choking hazard.
- Check toys regularly for damage and other hazards.
- Stay up-to-date on toy recalls through the US Consumer Product Safety Commission website.

Prevention – Safe Toy Tips:

To make sure a toy is appropriate for your young child, check the label. In general, most toys on the market today are safe. But, injuries still occur in spite of tough government regulations and toy makers' efforts to test products. The first step in preventing toy-related injuries is to know what to look for. Toy makers follow the guidelines established by the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) in determining the age grading of a toy. The CPSC now requires labeling on toys that are designed for children between the ages of 3 and 6, which can pose a choking hazard for children under age 3. The labels must specifically state that the toy is unsafe for children under age 3 and the reason for the warning.

The age recommendation on a toy reflects the safety of a toy based on four categories. These include:

- the physical ability of the child to play with the toy.
- the mental ability of a child to know how to use the toy.
- the play needs and interests present at various levels of a child's development.
- the safety aspects of a particular toy.
Families with children of various ages should remember that toys for older children could pose a hazard to younger children. To prevent toy-related injuries or death, take the following safety steps:

**Choking:**
- Avoid letting your toddler (ages 3 and under) play with small toys and parts. Children in this age group still "mouth" objects, which can cause them to choke on small objects. A small parts tester can help determine if an object is a choking hazard.
- Make sure that the toy is sturdy and that no small parts (such as eyes, noses, buttons, or other parts) can break off the toy.
- Do not allow your child to play with latex balloons.
- Check under your furniture and between seat cushions for choking hazards, such as coins, marbles, watch batteries, buttons, or pen and marker caps.
- Avoid letting your child play on bean bag chairs that contain small foam pellets - if the bean bag chair rips, your child can inhale and choke on the pellets.
- An arrow, dart, or pellet can be a choking hazard when shot into a child's mouth.

**Falling or drowning:**
- Riding toys should be kept away from stairs, traffic, and bodies of water.
- Supervise your child while playing on a riding toy and make sure he/she fits properly on the toy.

**Suffocation and strangulation:**
- Remember to discard any plastic wrapping the toy came in - plastic wrapping can suffocate a small child.
- Infants should not have access to string longer than seven inches - especially from hanging objects in cribs and playpens - as they can strangle an infant.
- Strangling may occur if a string, rope, or cord from a toy gets tangled around a child's neck. Long objects can be deadly if your child falls or gets tangled up in them while in a crib.
- Loose or long parts of clothing, such as dangling hood cords, could also strangle your child when tangled or hooked on playground equipment.

**Other injuries:**
- Eye injuries often result from toys that shoot plastic objects or other flying pieces.
- Playing with electric plug-in toys or hobby kits may result in serious injuries. Burns and shocks may result from frayed cords, misuse, or prolonged use.
- Chemistry sets and other hobby kits may contain toxic substances or materials that can catch fire and cause serious skin and eye injuries, and also can cause explosions or poisoning.
- Injuries also can result from snapping or machine-gun noises made by some toys - noise levels that are higher than 100 decibels can damage your child's hearing. Caps are dangerous if used indoors or closer than 12 inches from your child's ear.
- Toy chests and other storage containers can cause serious childhood injuries, which can pinch, bruise, or break tiny fingers and hands when a lid closes suddenly. Your child also can suffocate if trapped inside a toy chest.

In addition, to protect your child from injury, be sure to always supervise him/her when playing with toys.
Identifying High-Risk Situations:

Scooter injury is the most common cause of toy-related injury and death. Toys to avoid:

The following toys are not appropriate for **infants**:
- toys that hang in cribs and playpens with strings longer than seven inches
- toys that are small enough to become lodged in an infant's throat
- plastic wrapping from toys, which itself is a suffocation hazard

The following toys are not appropriate for **children ages 3 and under**:
- small toys or toys with removal parts that can become lodged in the child's throat (for example, a stuffed animal with loose eyes, game pieces, batteries, or marbles)
- toys with breakable or loose parts (for example, toys with small wheels, or action figures with removable pieces)
- latex balloons
- plastic wrapping from toys, which itself is a suffocation hazard

**Infants and toddlers should never be given toys with any of the following:**
- parts that could pull off
- exposed wires
- parts that get hot
- painted lead paint
- toxic materials
- breakable parts
- sharp points or edges
- glass or brittle parts
- springs, gears, or hinged parts that could pinch or trap fingers

The following toys are not appropriate for **children ages 8 and under**:
- toys with sharp points or edges
- electrical toys with heating elements (for example, a toy oven set)
- toys that contain toxic substances (for example, certain art sets)
- toys that can trap fingers
- shooting and/or loud toys (such as bb guns, cap guns, or air guns)
- toys that may contain lead paint (usually older toys purchased at garage sales or flea markets)
- toys that do not adhere to US safety standards

**A special safety note about walkers:**
The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) discourages the use of walkers for the following reasons:
- In 2003, an estimated 3,200 children were treated for baby-walker related injuries.
- Babies in walkers can fall over objects or fall down stairs, and may roll into pools, heaters, and hot stoves.
- The use of walkers is associated with poisoning, especially in infants under 9 months of age. The walker puts a young infant at a level where they can reach household chemicals before they are mobile, and before many parents have baby-proofed their homes.
- These devices do not facilitate walking or faster/advanced mobility and may actually hinder certain motor development skills such as pulling-up, crawling, and creeping.
- Walkers give babies extra momentum to break through barriers such as safety gates, resulting in thousands of head injuries each year.
Note: Many manufacturers now make stationery walkers that allow babies to sit in place. These are a safer alternative to the moveable walkers. However, many physicians still believe that all walkers are unacceptable. Consult your child's physician for more information.

**Injury Statistics and Incidence Rates**

The following statistics are from the National SAFE KIDS Campaign and the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC):

**Injury and death rates:**
- Approximately 217,000 children, ages 14 and under, were treated at hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries in 2005. Nearly half of the children treated for these injuries were ages 4 and under.
- Most toy-related injuries do not require hospitalization (97 percent); however, in 2005, 20 children died due to toy-related injuries.

**Causes:**
- Injury from non-powered scooters is the leading cause of toy-related death.
- Sixty-four percent of toy-related deaths in 2003 were due to choking. About 71 percent of those deaths were attributed to toy balls.
- Other causes of toy-related deaths include drowning, suffocation, and riding toy accidents (such as when a child is hit by a motor vehicle while riding a toy, or when the child rides a toy into a body of water).

**Where, when, and who:**
- Riding toys are responsible for the majority of toy injuries among children ages 14 and under.
- Most riding toy-related injuries occur when a child falls from a toy.
- Almost half of all toy-related injuries (47 percent) occur to the head and face area.
- Children under age three are at greater risk for choking on toys than older children, due to their tendency to put everything in their mouths. In addition, the upper airways of children under age three are smaller than those of older children.

This handout was developed to help individuals understand more about injury prevention measures. It is meant to be used as a guide. Please consult the manufacturer's instructions and/or your healthcare provider if you have any questions.