**DECEMBER**

**SAFE TOYS AND GIFTS MONTH**

December is a time when gifts are given in abundance, to celebrate, to congratulate, and to show gratitude for people we spend time with. The safety and age appropriateness of gifts isn't always uppermost in the gift purchaser's mind though, mostly because we trust that the retailer is providing items that are already certified as safe and also because sometimes we're not totally clued into the needs or age specific particulars of the gift recipients.

December is observed as "Safe Toys and Gifts Month" as a means for alerting us to the need to be careful when making our toy and gift choices, and to prompt us to keep in mind their safety and suitability. Knowing what to look out for can make a big difference in preventing possible injuries from well-intentioned gifts. This newsletter provides an overview of the things to bear in mind when shopping for those toys and gifts.

***KEEP YOUR CHILD'S HOLIDAY TOY TIME SAFE!***

We're proud to celebrate Safe Toys and Gifts Month along with The National Safe Kids Campaign and the National Safety Council. Take a look at some tips for selecting safe toys for children:

* Consider the child's age, interests and skill level. Look for quality design and construction, and follow age and safety recommendations on labels.
* Use a small parts tester to determine whether small toys may present a choking hazard to children under age 3. Small parts testers can be purchased at toy or baby specialty stores or you can use the cardboard core of a toilet paper roll - if a toy can pass through, it is too small for young children and may cause them to choke if swallowed.
* Avoid toys with sharp points or edges, toys that produce loud noises, and projectiles (such as darts).
* Avoid toys with strings, straps or cords longer than 7 inches that may pose a risk for strangulation for young children.
* Avoid electrical toys with heating elements for children under age 8.
* Avoid cap guns that use caps that can be ignited by the slightest friction and can cause serious burns.

**Consider The Facts!**

* Falls and choking cause most toy-related deaths and injuries in children. Choking alone causes one third of all toy-related deaths - most often from balloons.
* Children 4 years old and younger account for almost half of all toy-related injuries and almost all deaths.
* Children younger than age 3 are at the greatest risk of choking because they tend to put objects - especially toys - in their mouths.

**Buy age appropriate toys.** Children soon let you know if you've purchased them a toy that's below their age group and most shoppers take great care to avoid such a slip-up. Yet, strangely we're prone to thinking that purchasing toys that are meant for an older age group is fine, as if somehow it's suggesting that the child in question is smarter than their age group already, or they'll "grow into it". The problem is that toys are age graded for safety reasons as much as for avoiding frustration and undesirability. Many toys aimed at older children contain small pieces which could be swallowed by a younger child.

**Be aware of what's not considered safe this season.** It's a really good idea to keep an eye on a consumer watchdog site to find out which toys have been recalled recently so that you can avoid buying them. Many consumer groups and government entities will send free email updates to your in-box alerting you to recalls and it only takes a few minutes to glance through them. If you're not sure, contact them for more information about specific product recalls *before* seeking to purchase the product.

**Avoid getting anything that has excess string or cords, such as slingshots.** Never consider BB guns as toys for kids – not only are these *not* kid's toys, they can take out an eye all too easily and leave the victim blinded. Equally, avoid buying toys that shoot off or send off pieces.

**Buy for durability.** With small children, durability is essential. Check that the item cannot be broken easily and ask what happens if the item is broken. You want to avoid any toy or product that breaks into shards, splinters, sharp pieces, or releases anything toxic.

**Take allergies and food or chemical sensitivities into account when purchasing gifts for any age group.** Both children and adults can be [allergic](http://www.wikihow.com/Live-With-Food-Allergies) or highly sensitive to a range of food gifts, especially such food as nuts, MSG infused food, chocolate, and so forth. Ask them if you don't already know, and avoid purchasing such food items as gifts.

Toys can sometimes be recalled for safety reasons. Check the National Safe Kids Campaign website [www.safekids.org](http://www.kidshealth.org/) for updates and information on recent toy recalls.

For additional information about safe toys, visit [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org/) > [Choosing Safe Toys](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/growth/learning/safe_toys.html).