

# CONSUMER'S EDGE

CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION, MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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## PLAYING IT SAFE: GUARDING AGAINST TOY-RELATED INJURIES

*A national toy retailer recalled 53,000 infant pacifier clips because their spring mechanisms can break and release small parts, posing a choking hazard.*

*A Pennsylvania toy manufacturer recalled 2.8 million arts and crafts tempera and finger paints containing harmful bacteria. Exposure to this bacteria poses a risk of serious illness, including a bacterial infection.*

*A New Jersey toy importer recalled 91,000 toy building sets because small parts were detaching, posing a choking hazard.*

*Self-balancing scooters or hoverboards caused over 100 burn injuries and property damage when the battery packs overheated, caught fire, and/or exploded. Ten importers and retailers recalled over half a million of these dangerous items.*

These are a just few examples of toy-related dangers uncovered by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) in past years. CPSC standards continue to improve toy safety. Today, toy manufacturers must comply with federal toy-making regulations on such things as:

- Small parts that could lodge in the throat;
- Sharp points and edges; and
- Paint and toxic materials.

Toy manufacturers are responsible for assuring their toys meet CPSC regulations; however, the CPSC does not approve specific toys for sale to consumers. When the CPSC identifies dangerous toys, it issues a recall notice to remove them from the marketplace. Manufacturers may also be subject to fines for selling toys that violate CPSC regulations.

The CPSC often learns about dangerous toys from consumers who report injuries or deaths, and by conducting on-site inspections of manufacturers and importers to check for compliance with regulations. But even after a dangerous toy has been recalled by the CPSC, consumers who previously purchased the toy are not individually notified about the recall.

The majority of toys on the market are safe if bought for the appropriate-aged child and used as intended. However, despite governmental and industry efforts, toys are not regulated on-line, or through resellers. So, the next toy you buy at a garage sale or online could potentially pose a danger to your child, as could a toy that has been sitting in your child's toy box.

Parents can minimize risks to their children if they take appropriate precautions and by learning to identify dangerous toys. Parents can also minimize risk by supervising their child's activities inside and outside their home. Some general guidelines are described below, along with resources for more detailed information.



### Toy Chests

Children can become trapped in toy chests. Any toy chest should be designed and intended for holding toys. Most new toy chests are. If you are buying one, whether new or used, purchase one with a spring-loaded lid support that will keep the lid open in any position and will not require adjustment. Or select one with sliding panels, a lightweight, removable lid, or no lid at all. The chest should have holes or spaces in front, sides or under the lid to provide ventilation.

### Baby Toys

Choking continues to be a significant cause of toy-related injuries and deaths, according to the CPSC. For children less than one year of age, two-thirds of injury



deaths were due to suffocation, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. An infant's mouth and throat are extremely flexible and can stretch to hold larger shapes than you'd expect. Always make sure an infant's toys are bigger than your child's fist. Keep in mind that to a young child, everything is a toy. Another way to test if toys may be inappropriate for infants: If it fits in a toilet paper tube, it's too small and a choking hazard.

### Toys on Wheels



Bicycles are a major source of childhood injury. Although the rate has decreased since the early 2000s, in 2020 over 100,000 children visited emergency rooms due to bicycle-related injuries according to the Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention.

Any child old enough to pedal a bike or ride with you in a bike-child-seat needs a helmet. Maryland law (Md. Transportation Code Ann. § 21-1207.1) requires anyone younger than 16 to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle. Be sure the two-wheelers you buy properly fit your child or they'll find them difficult to control. The CPSC recommends that children younger than six ride a bike only under adult supervision. Children younger than nine lack the skills to avoid dangerous traffic situations and should stay away from streets.

Skateboards, in-line skates, and hoverboards can also be hazardous, especially if children don't wear helmets and other protective equipment. Be sure to supply safety equipment with the bike, skateboard, skates, or hoverboard and insist they be worn.

### Age Grading Toys

Toy manufacturers follow the age-grading guidelines of the CPSC, which consist of four main sections:

- Play Categories: various play behaviors in which children engage and how they use toys during play;
- Toy Subcategories: general types or groups of toys that children use when participating in various play types;
- Age Groups: 10 specific groups from birth through age 12; and,
- Toy Characteristics: appropriate and appealing toy characteristics based on the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional levels and abilities of children as they progress through the 10 age groups.

When a manufacturer recommends that a toy not be given to a child under a certain age, follow that advice no matter how "advanced" your child may be. The age recommendation on the package of a toy is a minimum one. When a label says a toy is "not recommended for children under 8 years of age," that does not mean that every 8-year-old is mature enough to use it safely.

### Guidelines for Choosing Safe Toys

Even the most cautious parent sometimes buys a poorly designed toy or children's accessory, or selects something inappropriate. Presents given to children may not have been appropriately selected. Child safety advocates have developed some guidelines for safe toy buying. You can minimize dangers by following these rules:

- Read the label and follow the manufacturer's age recommendations.
- Avoid over-complicated toys. Be certain you – and when necessary, your child – understand the directions or instruction on a toy.
- Avoid toys with sharp edges, small parts, or strings.
- Check what material is inside stuffed toys. Beans, chopped walnut shells, or little plastic pellets can cause accidents if the toy is torn open and they fall out.
- Inspect older toys for wear and tear.
- Every toy isn't for every tot. Teach your older children to keep their toys out of the reach of younger children.

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## HOW TO CONTACT US

### Consumer Protection Division

200 St. Paul Place, 16th Fl., Baltimore, MD 21202

- **General Consumer Complaints:** 410-528-8662  
Toll-free: 1-888-743-0023 TDD: 410-576-6372  
En español: 410-230-1712  
9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday-Friday  
[www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/CPD/](http://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/CPD/)
- **Health Consumer Complaints:** 410-528-1840  
Toll-free: 1-877-261-8807 TDD: 410-576-6372  
9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday  
[www.marylandcares.org](http://www.marylandcares.org)
- **For information on branch offices** in Largo, Salisbury, Hagerstown, and a full list of offices across Maryland, visit: [www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/contactus.aspx](http://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/contactus.aspx)

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