

How to Choose Toys That Are Safest for Children

From the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA)

Recently we have witnessed the frequent and massive recalls of several toy products made in China. It's caused quite an upheaval in the toy manufacturing world, since 80 percent of toys in the U.S. are made in China. We know that there are recalls every year on toys, but not to this extent. The biggest issue with most of these recalls has been the use of lead paint and lead products in toys.

While the toy manufacturers and the country are trying to figure out how to deal with oversight and import regulations, parents want to know what they can do NOW to best protect their children from dangerous and potentially hazardous toys and products.

What are typical "hazardous" toys/children's products?

There are many concerns about children's toys and products that have come to public attention. The main ones are:

Lead content in materials:

- Lead is in both paint and plastic materials. Lead paint is banned in the U.S. due to its damaging health effects, especially in children. Lead in plastic is not banned, but it too can be hazardous if exposed to sunlight and air that breaks down its chemical composition.
- Lead has been found in toys of all kinds, but is also found in some children's necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and other handmade items.

Choking hazards:

- Many toys and materials have small pieces that, if broken, can be easily mouthed by young children and are therefore a choking hazard. Many toys today have buttons, switches, beads, magnets, and strings that can be removed. These types of toys are dangerous for young children.
- Children's clothing that have strings, laces, and buttons can pose a choking threat. Also baby booties or small items with zippers or beaded work are to be avoided.

Burns and other hazards:

- Many of the latest toys have plugs, heat up, fly, or have some potential to cause burns or other mishaps if something goes wrong. Everything that moves or heats up or uses some type of energy has risks. It is important with these kinds of toys and gadgets to make sure they are appropriate for your child's age and to supervise use of them.

How to choose toys/materials that are safest for your child:

Choosing "safe" toys and products for your child isn't always easy. Although there are testing kits available for lead, they are not always accurate. Only a laboratory can truly determine if an object has lead.

Here are some recommended safety practices to follow for toys and products for your children:

- Check out toy recall/safety list before buying. Call or go online (see Resources below) to check whether a toy you are thinking about purchasing or has been given to your child has been recalled.
- Do not buy "used" toys or equipment. Although it can be tempting to buy old toys at yard sales or online, many recalled toys are not returned or thrown away. It is safer to buy new—and check them out first.
- Buy toys that are appropriate for your child's age and maturity. Infants and toddlers tend to put things in their mouths. Do not buy toys they can swallow or that have attachments that can loosen or break and cause choking hazard. Take extra precautions when you have children of different ages at home.
- Supervise your child with moving toys, toys that use heat or otherwise could burn them.
- Keep the brand name and product number of new toys – either from the box or write them down in case of recalls so you can easily match the numbers.
- Return any recalled items or discard them so that no one else can use them.

Resources to use on regular basis:

It is important to just be aware with the products your child uses. Keep the following websites and phone numbers handy so that you can keep a regular watch on toys (and other items) that may affect your child's health and safety:

Most products are regulated under the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). You can go to their website online to see the latest (and former) toys and other products that have been recalled. Go to www.cpsc.gov or call the toll free hotline: 1-800-638-2772 .

Another website, www.Recall.gov, has all your sources for recalls on one site. There is a specific tab for household items, including toys. There are also tabs for recalls on automobiles, food, medicines, cosmetics, boats and so forth. On this site, you can look up any and all recalled products by type, product number, and other variables.

In response to the Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC's) recent toy hazard recalls, the American Academy of Pediatrics has compiled several resources to help keep children safe. The resources include frequently asked questions, guidelines for parents on toy safety, a list of age-appropriate toys and toys to avoid, and information about screening for lead exposure in children. Visit the [American Academy of Pediatrics](http://www.AmericanAcademyofPediatrics.org) website to view these resources.