

Why look for safer toys?

A high proportion of all the toys sold in Australia are sold in the last quarter of the year - in the lead up to Christmas.

There are simple, commonsense ideas to follow when choosing toys for children, that will help identify items that might be dangerous.

Toddlers most at risk

Toddlers under three are most at risk from toy injury. As they begin to explore, move about and play. One of the main risks is that they often exploring their world with their mouths.

Why toy injuries occur

Toys are involved in child injury for a variety of reasons. They may be:

- inherently dangerous: explosive or projectile 'toys' have inherent dangers because of what they are designed to do:
- badly made: toys may be poorly constructed and break easily with normal play:
- have built-in hazards: toys may have design faults that are dangerous - sharp edges that cause cuts, small parts that easily break off and are choking hazards, or they have the potential to pinch or crush fingers:
- dangerous for the wrong age group or size: toys are graded for particular ages. This is associated with a child's development and enjoyment. Toys that are safe for one age group may be dangerous for others:
- used incorrectly: toys assembled wrongly or being used incorrectly are common causes of injury.

Common toy injuries

The types of injuries are strongly related to the age and activities of the child.

Children under five:

- *took out and swallowed toy batteries;*
- *put small piece of lego up his nose;*
- *riding tricycle and could not stop, fell onto concrete;*
- *fell down, hitting head on toy box;*
- *fell backwards off ride-on toy, hit head;*
- *looking at toy, pulled trigger, hit in eye;*
- *fell over, sharp part of toy went through roof of mouth;*
- *playing, fell onto sharp toy.*

Age five to nine years:

- *riding scooter, caught toe in spokes;*
- *tripped over pull-along toy, hit head on tiled floor;*
- *wire from toy stuck in finger;*
- *caught finger in toy box;*
- *fell from climbing frame;*
- *poked plastic toy in ear;*
- *fell off roof of cubby house;*
- *swallowed marble.*

Ten to fifteen years:

- *wrestling with sister, hit knee on sharp edge of toy box;*
- *tried to jump on moving 3 wheel bike, landed on cross-bar;*
- *playing with rubber dart gun, hit in eye;*
- *fell out of billy-cart, leg dragged under.*

Buying Safer Toys

Take notice of the age recommendation.

These are linked to a child's development and to safe use. When buying for an older child, think about a young child's access to the toy. A toy marked as not suitable for a child aged under 3 years may have small parts which a young children can swallow.

Get advice on recommended brands and toys.

Teachers, friends and toy libraries can help in finding appropriate and enjoyable toys and reliable brands.

Read the label and instructions.

Check that it is non-toxic, non-flammable, carries a recommended age and has the distributor's contact details in case there is a problem.

Avoid explosive or projectile toys.

Inspect the toy.

Look at the quality of the work and for things that might be a danger for the child:

- **Small parts:** anything smaller than a ping pong ball is a choking hazard for a young child.
- **Sharp edges or points.**
- **Noisy toys** can damage hearing.
- **Long strings or ribbons** can strangle a child and should be less than 30 cm long.
- **Weak construction:** seams that come apart or loose pieces such as eyes or buttons are a choking hazard.
- **Small ends on baby's toys:** these can reach well back in the baby's mouth.
- **Moving parts:** these can pinch or trap little fingers.

Return faulty toys to retailers.

child safety is no accident

Which Toys For Which Age?

Age guides for toys are linked to safety and to child development - they are not a measure of intelligence. Although it is tempting to think a child is *smart enough* for toys suited to an older child, it is safer and wiser to follow the age guides.

The following guide is a broad indication of what to look for:

Under three years of age

Avoid toys with small parts that could separate (swallowing hazard), sharp edges, strings or cords, or toys that require difficult finger movements. Avoid toys that include the need to read or write. Buy solid, sturdy toys.

From six months to twelve months (*everything is explored by putting it in the mouth*).

Suitable toys: bath toys, soft and cuddly toys, soft balls, push and pull toys, strong rattles, simple block and construction puzzles, mobiles - out of reach, washable squeaky toys.

At this age, the main dangers with toys are choking, poisons, and sharp edges. Older children's toys are a particular hazard.

From twelve months to two years (*the child still places objects in the mouth and has little sense of danger*).

Suitable toys: large solid wooden toys, blocks, soft toys, rid-on toys, push-pull toys, washable cloth books, trucks, cars, large coloured balls, bucket and spade.

Falls are added to the list of dangers. These children are also at high risk for drowning and being run-over.

Two to three years (*manual skills increase but 'the world' is still explored by putting objects in the mouth*)

Suitable toys: sandpit toys, peg boards, large building blocks, solid construction sets, pull toys, push toys, large non-toxic crayons, small table and chair.

The hazards are the same as for younger ages, but children move faster and further.

Over three

Three years to six years (*the child wants to explore and be more creative*)

Suitable toys: non-toxic paints and crayons, blackboard, jigsaw, toy garden tools, tricycle, pedal car, toy trucks and other vehicles, water toys, paddling pool, plastic tea set, broom and carpet sweeper, non-electric train.

Four years (*the child loves to explore and find out about the world and to mimic others*)

Suitable toys: simple games, puzzles, dress-ups, modeling materials, musical instruments, construction sets, outdoor play equipment, pedal powered toys.

Five years (*the child is developing better physical co-ordination and language skills*)

Suitable toys: games, story books, doll's prams, jigsaws, paints, clay, modeling materials, outdoor play equipment, colouring books, blunt-end scissors.

The hazard from water is still high and children need to be supervised near water at all times. Children get stronger, faster and more physical. Projectile toys present a danger, especially as boys of these ages often like to throw things.

Six years and over (*there is a need for more difficult and challenging activities*)

Suitable toys: board and indoor games, sewing and carpentry sets, word and number games, jigsaws, small bicycles, train sets, sports gear, roller blades, skateboards.

As children get older, toys tend to get more specific to the interests of the child and are often more activity-based. Gifts should still be linked to child development. Sports equipment should come with suitable protective gear.

Using Toys Safely

Read the instructions and dispose of packaging carefully:

- Arrange safe places to play. Children and adults falling over or on top of scattered toys is the most common form of injury associated with toys. Keep toys off walkways and stairs.
- Keep toys for older kids away from children. Toys that are safe for one age group may be dangerous for others. A small child on a big bicycle does not have the development to ride safely.
- Store toys down low so children can reach them easily without climbing. Toy containers that are light, with rounded edges and loose fitting lids are best. Avoid heavy hinged lids that can crush fingers and large air-tight containers.
- Check the condition of toys as you tidy up. Repair or throw out any that are no longer safe.

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**This fact sheet
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