

# Wellness

## EMPLOYEE

# report



## Toy Safety

“You’ll take your eye out, kid!”

At one time, a couple of sticks, a bag of rocks, an old bucket and an empty coffee tin were just about all a kid needed for an afternoon of fun and imagination.

While most of us made it through childhood with no more than the usual scrapes and bruises, there were always exceptions. These days, parents are faced by a larger than ever collection of gadgets and gizmos when they browse toy store shelves. And the potential hazards of modern toys aren’t as obvious as they were with sticks and stones.

In Canada, any toy advertised, sold or imported must meet strict safety requirements, as defined in the *Hazardous Products Act* and the *Hazardous Products (Toys) Regulations*. Toy manufacturers and distributors need to ensure that their toys meet these requirements. And while Product Safety Officers from Health Canada regularly monitor retailers for unsafe toys, it’s

inevitable that some products that fall below standard will find their way to market, get stocked and sold, and make their way into toy boxes.

Knowing what to look for to ensure the toys your children play with are safe is a responsibility everyone needs to share. Safety information should always be included in toy packaging, and despite their fine print, warnings and instructions are included for a reason.

### Age appropriateness

It’s important to choose toys according to a child’s age, interest and skill level. Toys which are inappropriate are almost guaranteed to be unsafe and harmful to younger children, particularly those under the age of three. Toys with small parts or pieces pose a serious choking hazard. Remember, especially when families

and friends gather, it’s easy for younger children to get their hands on toys designed for an older age group.

### Get the lead out

In 2004 Health Canada issued a safety advisory for people to throw out jewelry purchased through vending machines because some were found to contain lead. The decision led to the large-scale recall of more than 100 million pieces of toy jewelry.

It’s important that a toy is sturdy and that there are no loose parts or sharp edges. Wooden toys need to be checked for splinters, and painted toys should always specify that the paint is non-toxic. For all electronic toys, it’s mandatory for the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) label to be attached, indicating that the toy has been tested for shock and fire hazards.

## The case against magnets

In August 2008, Health Canada reissued an earlier advisory to the public about the danger of children swallowing small magnets. This had become a serious concern when a number of high-profile, wide-scale toy recalls were initiated by toy manufacturers after magnets separated from certain toys. Just recently, a five-year-old child in British Columbia required emergency surgery to remove two magnetic toy parts that she had swallowed.

In the event that a child swallows more than one magnet, especially over a short period of time, the magnets can attach to one another while travelling through the intestines. The magnets can then slowly tear through the intestinal walls, and block or twist the intestines. The result can be serious, if not fatal.

In April 2007, the US Consumer Product Safety Commission reported 33 cases of emergency surgery on children due to swallowed magnets. The incidents confirm the serious consequences of swallowing magnets, regardless of a child's age.

Source: Health Canada

## Battery beware

With more and more battery powered toys on the market, it's important to be mindful of the following safety precautions.

- Read and follow all warnings and instructions carefully.
- Make sure all batteries are installed correctly, and not placed in a reversed position.
- Make sure batteries in toys are properly installed and not accessible to children. Battery operated toys for children under three should have the batteries enclosed in a location on the toy that requires tools to remove them (i.e., a screw holds the enclosure closed).
- All batteries used in a toy should be of the same age and type. Do not mix and match older batteries with newer ones, or alkaline with carbon, or rechargeable with non-rechargeable.
- Only charge batteries that are intended to be recharged. Recharging batteries that are non-rechargeable could result in their rupture.
- Instruct children that if batteries come out of a toy, they should give the batteries and the toy to an adult to re-insert. If batteries continue to fall out, the toy should be returned to the store where it was purchased.
- Parents should check batteries in toys frequently. Batteries should not be left in toys for long periods of time.
- Teach children that battery-operated toy vehicles with wheels should never be put near hair, as the hair can get caught and pulled into the wheels of the vehicle.
- Always keep button-sized batteries out of reach of young children as these can easily cause a choking hazard.
- And finally, don't allow children to sleep with a battery-operated toy. This is one way that a battery can overheat and cause a fire or burn.

Source: Health Canada

As long as there are children, there will be toys. Despite the precautions in place, unsafe toys inevitably make it to store shelves, and all too often, the dangers they pose remain unrecognized until it's too late. Practising diligence about the appropriateness and construction of the toys our children are exposed to will go a long way to ensure nothing more than many happy, healthy childhood memories for everyone.

Sources: Health Canada product advisories @ <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/advisories-avis/alpha-eng.php>; Health Canada Consumer Product Safety @ <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/index-eng.php>; Canadian Paediatric Society @ <http://www.cps.ca/english/index.htm>; CBC News Online @ [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca) (INDEPTH, December 2004); US Consumer Product Safety Commission.

\*To report a safety-related concern with a consumer product, the public is advised to contact the Health Canada Product Safety office, toll-free, at 1-866-662-0666, or email [cps-spc@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:cps-spc@hc-sc.gc.ca)



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