



Putnam County Department of Health
1 Geneva Road, Brewster, New York 10509
845-808-1390

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: Tuesday, December 12, 2012

Contact: Michelle Martine, Child Advocacy Center, 845-808-1400 x 44122
Barbara Ilardi, Health Department, Public Information Officer, 845-808-1390

HOLIDAY SHOPPING IS UNDERWAY

Safety Tips to Keep in Mind When Selecting Children's Toys

BREWSTER, NY—Many kids are compiling their holiday wish lists and parents have started shopping. Considering toy safety is important when selecting gifts and Putnam County's Child Advocacy Center (CAC) and the Department of Health (PCDOH) offer some guidance.

“There are still unsafe toys on the shelves and parents and caregivers need to be careful when shopping,” says Marla Behler, CAC coordinator. Ms. Behler was referring to the 27th annual “Trouble in Toyland” report released last month by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), which found toxic substances such as lead, cadmium and phthalates (pronounced “tha-lates”) in children's toys. Each of these toxins has been proven to adversely affect the health and development of young children.

Allen Beals, MD, Commissioner of Health, points out that lead remains a problem despite legislation that bans its use in some products and restricts it in others. “While lead has been banned in house paint and items marketed to children, there are still significant numbers of imported items, particularly toys and children's jewelry that are not held to these standards,” Dr. Beals explains.

This holiday season the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) present an updated and

comprehensive look at the lead risk in children's gifts on their website. For more information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/LeadInToys/index.html>

Other problematic toys include ones with small parts that can result in choking or those with projectiles that cause eye injury. Overly loud toys may damage hearing, and there are a growing list of items with small, high-powered magnets that can cause severe gastrointestinal injuries if swallowed. The age appropriateness of a toy should always be considered. (See attached sheet on Toy Safety Tips.)

For busy consumers out shopping for the latest toys, the PIRG has developed a free mobile app for smart phones. It provides instant access to a list of recalled toys, tips and hazards, as well as a way to report unsafe toys. Just point your browser on your phone, or computer, to: <http://www.toysafety.mobi/>

The CAC's mission is to improve the lives of children, which includes reducing serious injuries and deaths. For more information please visit <http://www.putnamcountyny.com> and under "Departments" select Child Advocacy Center, or visit our social media site on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/putnamcac>

The Health Department's mission is to protect and improve the health of the county's nearly 100,000 residents. For more information, please visit www.putnamcountyny.com or social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY

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For further information:

U.S. Public Interest Research Group @ <http://www.uspirg.org/reports/usp/trouble-toyland>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention @
<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/LeadInToys/index.html>

TOY SAFETY TIPS —AVOIDING COMMON HAZARDS

Listed below are some of the most common, toy-related hazards for children:

1. Choking is the most common cause of toy-related deaths. More than 41 children choked or aspirated to death from balloons, toys, or toy parts, from 2005 to 2009, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

- **Bigger is better.** Do not buy small toys or toys with small parts for children under age 3. If a toy or toy part can pass through a toilet paper tube, it is too small for a child still putting things in his/her mouth.
- **Read and pay attention to warning labels.** Toys with small parts, for children between ages 3 and 6, are required by law to include an explicit choking hazard warning.
- **Keep small balls or balloons away from young children.** Small balls, balloons and balloon pieces are particularly dangerous, as they can block a child's airway. Balls for children under 6 years old must be more than 1.75 inches in diameter. Never give latex balls to children younger than 8 years old.

2. Lead, phthalates and other toxins are still found in children's toys, jewelry and cosmetics.

- High levels of lead have been found in paint on toys, as well as in vinyl lunch boxes and bibs, and children's costume jewelry. Toys bought in thrift stores, garage sales, eBay or from other second-hand sources are at higher risk of lead contamination.
- Phthalates are man-made chemicals that give plastic its flexibility. Some are banned from use in toys, but others are still in use. Avoid toys made of PVC plastic which phthalates which pose developmental risks to children. Choose unpainted wooden or cloth toys instead.
- Other toxins include cadmium, often used to replace lead, which may be found in jewelry as well.
- Varying restrictions are in place, but toys made outside the U.S. and older items may not conform.

3. Magnetic toys now often include powerful, small magnets. Magnetic building toys, toy darts, magnetic jewelry, and others feature these dangerous magnets that often fall out and look like shiny candy. If a child swallows more than one, the magnets can attract each other within the body, in the stomach and intestines, and cause life-threatening complications. Even if only one magnet is swallowed, seek immediate medical attention.

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4. Watch or "button" batteries contain battery acid that can cause fatal internal injuries when swallowed. Keep them away from children. If swallowed, seek immediate medical attention.

5. Noisy toys can cause hearing loss. Children's ears are especially sensitive. If a toy seems loud to you, it is probably too loud for a child. Remove batteries or cover the speakers with tape.

6. Strangulation hazards include any item with a cord or string. For example, mobiles should be out of the reach of children in cribs and should be removed before the baby can push him/herself up (around five months). Cords, such as those for stringing large beads, should be shorter than one foot to prevent entanglement.

7. Projectile toys that launch parts through the air may cause eye injuries.

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ADDITIONAL TIPS include:

***Age appropriateness** should always be considered when selecting a toy. Even if a child is advanced for his or her age, that doesn't mean it is safe the child to play with a toy made for an older level. The safety recommendations are developed based on safety concerns alone, not maturity or intelligence. Find more information @ http://kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/home/safe_toys.html Click on "What's in this article?" and select "The Right Toys at the Right Ages."

***Wearing protective gear** is necessary to avoid injuries in certain sports. For example, helmets along with knee and elbow pads and wrist guards should be worn on bicycles, scooters, skateboards and inline skates, among others.

***Stay informed of toy recalls @ www.recalls.gov**

This is particularly important with older toys bought second hand. An archive of recalls is available. Those interested can to sign up to receive email alerts of new recalls.

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Adapted from: U.S Public Interest Research Group
website @ <http://uspirgedfund.org/resources/usf/tips-toy-safety>