

The holiday season is in full swing, which means we have only a few weeks left to shop for Christmas presents. For anyone shopping a child, it's important to take their age and safety into consideration.

A new report from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) shows in 2014 there were an estimated 183,800 toy-related injuries and 11 deaths nationwide.

When it comes to toys and gifts, the excitement and desire to get our kids their favorite toys may cause us to forget about safety factors associated with them. Before we buy, it is critical to remember to consider the safety and age range of the toys.

December is Safe Toys and Gifts Awareness Month. Created by Prevent Blindness America, the message of the month is to encourage everyone to consider if the toys they want to give suit the age, skills and abilities of the individual child who would receive it, especially for infants and children under age three.

It's an important message for both this holiday season and beyond. So while you're shopping, please consider the following guidelines for choosing safe toys for all ages:

Inspect all toys before buying. Avoid those that shoot or include parts that fly off. The toy should have no sharp edges or points and should be sturdy enough to withstand impact without breaking, being crushed, or being pulled apart easily.

When buying toys for children with special needs try to: Choose toys that may appeal to different senses such as sound, movement, and texture; consider interactive toys to allow the child to play with others; and think about the size of the toy and the position a child would need to be in to play with it. Able Play is a website that has a toy rating system for children of all abilities.

Be diligent about inspecting toys your child receives as gifts. Check them for age, skill level, and developmental appropriateness before allowing them to be played with.

Look for labels that assure you the toys have passed a safety inspection – “ATSM” means the toy has met the American Society for Testing and Materials standards.

Gifts of sports equipment should always come with protective gear. Don’t just buy a kid a skateboard, buy them a helmet too.

Keep kids safe from lead in toys by: Educating yourself about lead exposure from toys, symptoms of lead poisoning, and what kinds of toys have been recalled; being aware that old toys may be more likely to contain lead in the paint; having your children wash their hands frequently and calling your doctor if you suspect your child has been exposed to lead.

Do **NOT** give toys with small parts (including magnets and “button” batteries which can cause serious injury or death if ingested) to young children as they tend to put things in their mouths, increasing the risk of choking. If the piece can fit inside a toilet paper roll, it is not appropriate for kids under age three.

Do **NOT** give toys with ropes and cords or heating elements.

Do **NOT** give crayons and markers unless they are labeled “nontoxic”.

By NM Dept. of Health