

Safety important consideration in selecting gifts for children

Thinking about getting a portable basketball hoop for the athlete in your family? Does your 10-year-old want to learn soap making. Considering a baby walker or swing for your newest family member?

It is the time of year for thinking about giving and receiving presents. But some of these gifts, according to the Texas Department of Health (TDH), have hidden hazards.

A few simple precautions can help people buying gifts for children make the best decisions, according to Annabelle Dillard with TDH's Product Safety Division.

"Parents should not buy toys with small parts for children under 3," Dillard said.

"In addition, some toys can break, exposing young children to the hazards of choking on small internal parts. For example, recent product recalls have included plastic toys that can easily break and stuffed toys with parts or seams that can be detached during normal use, exposing parts that are small

enough to become lodged in a child's windpipe."

To find out if a small part on a toy is a choking hazard, parents can use a simple test. Take the cardboard tube from a roll of toilet paper, if the part can pass through the tube, it could choke a child.

In addition to safeguarding children from obvious hazards such as small parts and sharp edges, parents need to train their children to be aware of safety issues, Dillard said. Most adults know that electronics and water don't mix, but children may not recognize the dangers of electrical shock.

Many model and art kits contain paint and glue that require knowing about proper use and adequate ventilation. Parents also should train older children to keep their toys away from younger siblings who may not know how to use them.

When selecting toys, pay attention to labels.

"Keep in mind the age and skill level of the child you're shopping for,"

Dillard said. "Look for age recommendation on the label such as 'Not recommended for children under 3' to guide you in finding a safe, age-appropriate toy. And keep in mind also that a few months can make a huge difference in the skills level of a small child, so it's best not to give an 18-month-old child a toy designed for a two-year-old."

The "Toy Sweeps 2002" was held Nov. 18-22. This is when TDH inspectors go out looking for recalled toys and other children's items on retail store shelves.

"When recalled toys are found on the shelves, they notify the retailer to remove the items and send it to the

manufacturer for replacement and refund," Dillard said. "TDH also educates retailers about the importance of posting the recall notice so that consumers who already have purchased the item can stop using it, fix it or return it."

This year, inspectors are concentrating on baby walkers, baby swings, stuffed toys, children's toys, ride-on toys and cars, bicycles and portable basketball hoops.

Recalls can occur for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, as can be the case with basketball hoops and bicycles, sharp edges can injure a child. Some items can be fixed using instructions from the manufacturer; others will need

to be returned for repair or replacement.

Sometimes design flaws or inadequate assembly instructions can cause problems as in the case of some baby swings that malfunction when assembled incorrectly.

Some toys and craft kits such as a soap-making kit have packaging that melts when heated. Toys that require heating or microwaving can burn a child if not used properly.

Information on recalls and safe gift giving is available on the Consumer Product Safety Commission's web site at www.cpsc.gov or by calling the TDH Product Safety Division at 512-834-6773.

"The last thing people want to do when giving a gift is harm a child," Dillard said. "Awareness of dangers and prompt action protects buyers, sellers and children."

Deck your halls with holiday crafts

(NAPSA)—Open the door to holiday cheer. Using a pinch of spirited imagination and the right supplies, you can turn your home into a winter wonderland with the following easy and affordable craft ideas.

Craft products such as paint and finishes are easy to use, come in a variety of vibrant seasonal colors and can be used to turn any everyday item or garage sale find into a wonderful gift or decoration. Craft, hardware, discount and home center stores all carry a variety of paints and other craft items.

Festive Fun At Your Fingertips

Here are holiday craft ideas that will help turn any home into a haven for the holidays.

•Jingle Bells: Bring the sounds of the holidays into the home. Paint old

sleigh bells (or store-bought versions) with distinctive finishes such as distressed ivory or antique gold from American Accents®. Simply paint and, using craft wire, thread the bells onto holiday-themed ribbon. Add pinecones and dried berry clusters and tie the top of the ribbon into a full bow.

•Serving Sleds: Create inexpensive decorative sled napkin rings or tabletop servers by spray painting unfinished wood sled ornaments in a festive color such as Rust-Oleum's® metallic cobalt blue. Use silver and claret wine-colored paints from American Accents to accent the sled "runners," and decorate the top of the sled with silver ribbon snowflake decals. To create napkin rings, simply thread napkins through the runners.

•Joy to the World: Add "joy" to your home by painting unfinished wood letters spelling J-O-Y in a burgundy or dark green from American Accents. Place on a shelf, door or wall as a reminder of the spirit of the season.

"It's very rewarding to create your own decorations and gifts for the holidays," said Jan Healy, Rust-Oleum brand manager and avid do-it-yourselfer. "For the best results, always use high-quality products such as American Accents and Painters Touch™ paints and finishes to ensure your projects look great and last a long time."

Visit www.paintideas.com for a complete list of craft ideas and directions; for product availability, visit www.rustoleum.com.

Soothing a holiday stomach

Turkey and dressing and heartburn, oh my! This holiday season, many people will unfortunately receive the gift that keeps on giving—heartburn and stomach upset.

"The holiday foods we love best, like turkey, gravy and pie, are made up almost completely of fat," said Dr. Gulchin Ergun, medical director of the Reflux Center at Baylor College of Medicine and The Methodist Hospital in Houston. "The same fat that makes our food taste so good also can give us heartburn."

Heartburn is caused when stomach acid overcomes the barrier between the stomach and esophagus, called the sphincter, which keeps the lower end of the esophagus closed when a person is not swallowing food or liquids. Foods that contain fat cause the sphincter to relax, allowing the acid to come up more easily into the chest. The result is a burning pain in the chest and the abdomen that can last for hours and is often accompanied by a sour taste.

The simple way to prevent heartburn is to avoid the foods and drinks that trigger it, like high fat foods, foods high in acidity like cranberry sauce, and alcoholic drinks.

But if you just can't give up your favorite treats, the following tips may help soothe your holiday stomach:

- Move around. Lying down after a big meal may help trigger heartburn. "Chest pressure is negative, and your body wants to move things from a positive to a negative area," Ergun said. "If you are lying down after a big meal, it makes it easier for stomach acid to move up. "Ergun suggests taking a walk, or playing a game of touch football with your family after your meal.

- Take an antacid. For immediate relief, over-the-counter antacids work fastest to reduce the acid that causes heartburn or stomach upset.

- Eat in moderation. If you can't give up your mother's famous pecan pie, then go easy on the ham or just eat only a portion of everything on your plate.

- Having a small amount of heartburn around the holidays isn't necessarily bad for you," Ergun said. "But you should really see your doctor if you are having symptoms two or three times a week."

Annually, more than 7 million Americans suffer from chronic heartburn, called Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD). Left untreated, GERD can increase the risk for esophageal cancer. Diet modification, prescription drugs and surgery are all options to relieve the symptoms of GERD.

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BRUSH UP FOR CHRISTMAS!

We're donning bright smiles as we think about all the great folks we've had the privilege to serve this past year. Thanks!

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Vilma Fernandez, D.D.S.
And Staff