PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

TOY AND PRODUCT SAFETY TIPS

By Mary Krauze

Recent recalls from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and toy manufacturers have raised much concern over the safety of our children's toys. As parents, the best protection we can offer our children is to be informed of potential hazards and select their toys, clothing, and accessories based on current recommendations for what is safe, age-appropriate and constructive.

The latest recalls have highlighted the potential hazards of lead poisoning. In addition to using lead in paint, some manufacturers continue to use lead as a low-cost way of adding weight to items like small pieces of jewelry, and to increase flexibility in vinyl goods. In recalling more than one million toys which may be coated with lead paint, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission indicates that lead is toxic when ingested and can cause brain damage linked to learning disabilities, behavioral problems and, at very high levels, seizure, coma and even death. In addition to toys, lead has been found in jewelry, metal key chains, vinyl bibs, vinyl lunch boxes, vinyl backpacks and clothing with lead-based zippers or buttons.

Lead poisoning occurs when toxic levels of lead build up in the body over time. Simply touching a toy containing lead is not an immediate problem, as lead cannot be absorbed through the skin. However, in addition to swallowing an item containing lead, such as a small charm, chewing or mouthing a toy containing lead or coated with lead paint is dangerous. Parents are cautioned not to burn a toy or article containing lead, as lead fumes can be inhaled.

The first symptoms of lead poisoning are very general, and include nausea, sluggishness, vomiting, painful gastrointestinal irritation, diarrhea, loss of appetite, colic, weakness and dehydration. Other symptoms may include memory problems, reduced coordination, irritability, hyperactivity, increased sleeping, decreased activity and fatigue, hearing loss, vomiting, slow reflexes, and muscle weakness, affecting mainly the upper extremities. Children who ingest dangerous levels of lead do not always show symptoms right away, and many children with lead poisoning do not exhibit symptoms at all. If you think your child is at risk, your pediatrician can perform a simple blood test.

Other recent product recalls have been based on the danger of magnets, which, when present in children's toys and other items may become detached and swallowed. The Consumer Product Safety Commission has issued a safety alert about the serious dangers magnets pose to children. If two or more magnets or magnetic pieces, or a magnet and another metal object are swallowed separately, they can attract one another through intestinal walls. This traps the magnets in place and can cause intestinal damage, infection, blood poisoning and death.

If you suspect that your child has swallowed a magnet, seek immediate medical attention. The CPSC recommends that parents keep small magnets and small pieces containing magnets away from children, and to also continually monitor items in your home for loose magnetic pieces or missing or dislodged magnets. Use caution in purchasing products made for adults that may contain magnets if there are young children in your home.

It is important that parents are knowledgeable about how best to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children. ***No amount of preventive information can substitute for parental vigilance and supervision - always be aware of where your child is and what he is doing.*** For further information about the dangers of lead poisoning and magnets, product recalls, and creating a healthy play environment for your child, please visit the following websites.

Additionally, log on to Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County's website www.cce.cornell.edu/orange for additional articles on this topic and other topics for parents, caregivers and informed consumers. This is just one of the ways Cornell Cooperative Extension can help you put knowledge to work!

www.cpsc.gov

www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/category/toy.html

www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prhtml06/06127.html

www.service.mattel.com/us/recall.asp

http://blogs.consumerreports.org/safety

www.ceh.org/

www.webmd.com/parenting/news/20070802/
toy-recall-what-parents-should-know

www.newsforparents.org/expert_play_it_safe.html

www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/grand/toy/toysafe.html

www.goodhousekeeping.com/lead-recalls

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