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**CONTACT:** MARY WADE TRIPLETT, PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER  
**MONONGALIA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**  
**TELEPHONE:** 304-598-5152  
**MARYWADE.TRIPLETT@WV.GOV**

**DO YOUR HOMEWORK BEFORE DECIDING WHICH TOYS TO BUY AS HOLIDAY GIFTS**

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Do children need to be supervised when charging batteries? How old should children be to begin playing with LEGO bricks? And should you keep those pieces away from their toddler siblings?

Before parents purchase toys for their kids during this holiday season, they should do some research and use common sense to determine whether the item is a good fit depending on the child’s age, maturity and abilities.

December is Safe Toys and Gifts Month, and to honor the designation as well as the upcoming holidays, the Monongalia County Health Department would like to pass on some tips on buying toys and gifts for children, courtesy of the Mayo Clinic and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- Before buying a toy, make sure that it is recommended for kids in your child’s age range. LEGO bricks, for instance, come in larger sizes that do not pose the choking hazards that the smaller pieces can and are recommended for children ages 3 and 4.

- Inspect all toys before purchasing. Avoid those that shoot or include parts that fly off. Toys 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 purchasing 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. Consult the “AblePlay” website at http://www.ableplay.org/ for more information.

- Be diligent about inspecting toys your child has received. 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 be accompanied by protective gear. Give a helmet with the bicycle and a helmet and elbow and knee pads with skateboards, in-line skates, etc.

- Keep kids safe from **lead in toys**. Educate yourself about lead exposure from toys, symptoms of lead poisoning and what kinds of toys have been recalled; be aware that old toys may be more likely to contain lead in the paint; make sure children wash their hands frequently and calling your doctor if you suspect your child has been exposed to lead. Check out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s website on lead in toys: cdc.gov/features/leadintoys/index.html.

- Do **NOT** give young children toys with small parts, including magnets and “button” batteries, which can cause serious injury or death if ingested. Young children often put things in their mouths, which increases the risk of choking. If the piece can fit inside a toilet paper roll, it is not appropriate for kids under age 3.

- Keep an eye on any batteries that come with toys. Either charge the batteries yourself or supervise older children that charge them.

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

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

For more information, check out cpsc.gov/safety-education/safety-guides/toys.