

# Use care when buying gifts for kids

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By Hannah Mask Staff Writer

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For those who may have saved a bit of holiday shopping for the last minute, health care officials say grabbing things off shelves without first looking at warning labels for children could have serious consequences.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission reported 181,500 children under 15 were treated in emergency rooms as a result of toy-related injuries in 2010. There were 17 toy-related deaths.

Dr. Karen Landers, area health officer for Alabama, said items containing lithium batteries, also known as button batteries, can be especially dangerous for children. She said the batteries, which have gained popularity in recent years, are small, about the size of a nickle, and have the potential to be ingested.

Landers recommends going to a hospital emergency room immediately if a child swallows one of the batteries.

“There have been cases of serious burns and life-threatening and life-altering injuries (from battery ingestion),” she said.

The National Capital Poison Center in Washington, D.C., operates an around-the-clock hotline for battery ingestion cases and can be reached at 202-625-3333.

Most button batteries pass through the body and are eliminated in the stool, according to the website, [poison.org/battery](http://poison.org/battery). The site adds that sometimes batteries get “hung up” and causes problems. A battery stuck in the esophagus is especially likely to cause tissue damage, based on the site. “An electrical current can form around the outside of the battery, generating hydroxide (an alkaline chemical) and causing a tissue burn.”

Landers, who also is a pediatrician, said she tells parents anything that fits through the cardboard of a toilet paper roll is a potential choking hazard for a child in the toddler/preschool age group.

American Academy of Pediatrics officials said government regulations state that children under age 3 should not be given toys that have parts less than 1¼ inches in diameter and 2¼ inches long.

“One thing I caution parents about is if your kids have put something where it’s not supposed to be — like in their nose or ear — don’t try to get it out yourself if it’s stuck, short of doing the Heimlich if your child has swallowed something,” Landers said. “The foreign body can sit there until a skilled physician can remove it.”

But making sure the toys children are given are safe goes beyond potential choking hazards, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The organization cautions parents to “be a label reader.”

The website [cpsc.gov](http://cpsc.gov) states parents should look for the letters ASTM. Those letters mean the product meets the national safety standards set by the American Society for Testing and Materials.

Many stuffed animals can trigger asthma attacks since they can collect dust mites and other substances, so the consumer commission recommends looking for the “asthma and allergy friendly” trademark logo when buying gifts for children who are asthmatic.

Additionally, the commission states it’s important to provide properly sized helmets and other safety gear when giving riding toys, such as skateboards and skates.

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