

For Holiday Media Stories: Button Battery Hazards, Flu Shot Myths, and More Child Health Tips

Packard Children's Hospital Experts Available for Reporter Holiday Stories (Media can also excerpt content below)

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Within the holiday season's boxes, bunting and bountiful food lie many health hazards for children and families to watch out for. Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford offers the following advice to keep families safe and healthy in the closing months of the year. Contact us for expert interviews on these or any other child health topics this holiday season.

The Danger of Button Batteries

While parents are flocking to stores to get a remote-controlled helicopter or a doll that doubles as a camera, these gifts may contain a hidden danger: the high-powered and pervasive button battery, which has been responsible for injuring an estimated 23,000 children under the age of 13 and killing 12 children under the age of three, according to a recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"To avoid a trip to the emergency room, be sure to keep all button batteries away from small children," said Bernard Dannenberg, MD, director of pediatric emergency medicine. "These batteries discharge electricity, heat, and heavy metals if they are swallowed, and can burn a hole in the esophagus or intestines. They can cause poisoning."

As for bigger gifts, Dannenberg recommends the following: "If you choose to buy new sports equipment like bikes or skis, be sure to also buy the necessary head, wrist, and knee gear to avoid sprains and breaks," Dannenberg said. "We see a lot of injuries that could have been avoided."

Eat Well, Play Hard (even in the cold!)

OK, we love holiday food, but how do we balance it with exercise? "Instead of so much emphasis on the traditions that revolve around food, why not add some new traditions that require movement?" said obesity researcher Tom Robinson, MD, director of the Center for Healthy Weight. "Go out and play a game of football, head to the park or the petting zoo – and be sure to limit children's screen time, regardless of all of their video options."

"Our research has found many benefits from a budget of seven hours a week of total screen time, which includes TV, DVDs, video games, and computers," said Robinson, who's led multiple research efforts into the relationship between screen time and children's eating habits, weight gain and effects on education.

"I also include portable devices like smart phones in that total budget."

And for those dealing with a cold climate? "Families need to know that kids don't get colds from being in the cold," Robinson said. "They get colds from viruses, which are passed from person to person. Sending kids out to play in the cold, or even the rain, will not get them sick."

Flu Shots Don't Cause the Flu!

Who wants their holidays ruined by the flu? Increase your chances of avoiding the nasty bug by getting a flu shot – which, despite legend, cannot bring about the flu. "People sometimes think that getting the flu vaccine causes the flu, but that is really a myth," said Yvonne Maldonado, MD, chief of pediatric infectious disease at Packard Children's. "We throw the word 'flu' around pretty easily. People may think they caught the flu, when in fact they have another respiratory virus."

"The flu vaccine has been shown to reduce the likelihood of getting the flu by 60 to 70 percent," Maldonado said. She urges patients to get the flu shot even if they have received one the year before, as the flu virus frequently mutates, thereby decreasing the body's immunity.

Road Trip to Grandma's

Fidgety kids make for tough travel. Lisa Chamberlain, MD, mother of two, has advice. "A good idea for long car trips is to take breaks at rest stops. Let the kids get out and play for a while," she said. What about snacks? "Filling a cooler with healthy bars, crackers, and bottled water can help parents avoid filling kids with junk food."

Whether plane, train, or automobile, Dr. Chamberlain stresses preparation. "Successful planning and packing needs to take into account the age and developmental stage of the child. Younger children need more distraction since their attention span is short. Parents need to bring a series of small things like books, magnetic games, crayons for drawing, and stickers so that they have one new activity to offer at needed intervals. Older children will obviously require fewer distinct activities."

Other Packard Children's Hospital Topics for Reporters:

Holiday stress, sleep schedules, hyperactivity and more. Contact Media Relations Manager Winter Johnson at [wjohnson\(at\)pch\(dot\)org](mailto:wjohnson(at)pch(dot)org) or 650-498-7056 for more information and to set up interviews with experts.

About Packard Children's Hospital

Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford is an internationally recognized 311-bed hospital, research center and leading regional medical network providing the full complement of services for the health of children and expectant mothers. In partnership with the Stanford University School of Medicine, our world-class doctors and nurses deliver innovative, family-centered care in every pediatric and obstetric specialty, tailored to every patient. Packard Children's is annually ranked as one of the nation's best pediatric hospitals by U.S. News & World Report and is the only

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