TIPS TO AVOID UNSAFE/UNTESTED TOYS

- Understand that online purchases are nearly always more risky because there's not as much transparency and returns can be more difficult or impossible.

- Consider purchases only from known, trusted sellers or the trademark holder. Companies you've never heard of warrant more research.

- Look at the brand's website to find authorized retailers. If a seller isn't on the list, the product may be a counterfeit.

- When shopping online, read reviews about the seller and look for an address and a working U.S. phone number in case you need to contact the seller. Also, does the website or listing have multiple typos or grammatical errors? That could be a flag.

- Look at the return policy. If it's a new item and returns aren't accepted, that could be cause for concern.

- Read reviews about the product itself. Look at the negative reviews first. Does it break easily? Is it poor quality?

- Figure out the shipping time. If it's weeks, it could be coming from overseas and/or direct to you, potentially bypassing inspection at the border and documentation of safety testing.

- If you have a toy or any other product in your hands, look for clues it may be unsafe or counterfeit: Does the label list country of origin? This is required for toys and many other items. Is the UPC valid? Numerous free phone apps allow you to scan the UPC or QR code and be directed to the manufacturer's website, assuming the product is genuine. For a list of some highly rated apps and other tips, see our guide: Counterfeit products: How to tell whether you bought one.

- If you purchase and receive a toy and it has a weird smell or something else is odd, don't give it. "If anything looks like it could be an issue, treat it like it's an issue," one CPSC commissioner advises.

- When your child gets a new toy, and periodically after that, check whether it has been recalled. Go to cpsc.gov/recalls. Check for incidents at saferproducts.gov

- Carefully check toys, both when they're new and every so often to see whether there's wear and tear. You're particularly looking for any parts that are loose or could easily break off and be swallowed or cut the child.

- Look for labeling on toys that says it's non-toxic.

- Make sure that anything that's electric says it's UL-approved.

- Vintage toys are great for the memories, but be wary of toys made before 2008, when the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act took effect. Toys that comply with that law are safer in many ways. The law set new limits on lead, phthalates and heavy metals, and requires third-party testing to make sure toys meet ASTM F963-17, which is the Standard Consumer Safety Specification for Toy Safety that covers a range of potential hazards in toys.

TIPS FOR AVOIDING INJURIES

- Evaluate whether particular toys are appropriate for *your* children, starting with the minimum age warning label.
  Even if your child is "old enough," they may not be able to be trusted to play with the toy as intended. Age-grading isn't about how intelligent a child is; it's safety guidance based on the developmental skills and of children at a particular age.

- Consider whether a child is also responsible enough to keep the toy out of reach of any younger children.

- For scooters, hoverboards and other riding toys, require your child to wear safety gear – particularly helmets that fit properly. Also make sure they understand how to ride on streets shared by vehicles that can injure or kill them.

- For any toys with plastic film coverings on toys to protect them during shipping, be sure to remove the film. It's often found on mirrors or parts that can be scratched before use. It can pose a choking hazard to children.

- Keep small balls, blocks and other toys with small parts out of reach from children younger than 3.

- High-powered tiny magnets are now prohibited from being manufactured. But the new federal rule doesn't affect magnets that may be in people's homes. If you have children or teens in your home, you shouldn't have tiny magnets, the [American Academy of Pediatrics says](#). Also explain to kids how dangerous these magnets are, in case they come across them at a friend's house.

- Keep water beads out of your home. Certain types of water beads haven't yet been banned, but they're dangerous for young children.

- Keep deflated balloons away from children younger than 8 and keep your ears open for an inflated balloon that pops. Children can choke on balloons that haven't been blown up and ones that have broken.

- For children younger than 18 months, keep them away from toys with any strings, straps or cords longer than 12 inches.

- If there are batteries, especially button batteries, make sure the compartments are secure and can't be opened by a young child. In addition, make sure to never leave new or used batteries where children can reach them.

- Watch out for painted jewelry, cheap metal or other toys with paint that seems to chip off easily. We know young children often put things in their mouths. The objects could contain lead, which is particularly harmful to children's developing brains and nervous systems.

TIPS FOR SMART TOYS

- Understand all of the toy's features.
  Features to consider carefully:
  Cameras, microphones or sensors
  Chat functions
  Location sharing
  In-app purchases
  Level of individual personalization the toy is programmed to accomplish

  Features that can be helpful:
  Parental safety controls
  Ability to set time limits

- Look for toys with a physical component to connect it to the internet: This can be as simple as having a button on the toy you must press in order to link it to other devices. Making sure someone must physically interact with the toy helps cut down on the risks of strangers abusing its internet connection. Some toys will require you to enter a password in an app to connect with the toy. This is a good, but physical requirements are best.

- Read the terms and conditions. Disclosures, and terms and conditions aren't fun or easy to read, but when it comes to toys, it's important for parents to read enough to try and find answers to key questions. These include:

1. If the toy has a microphone or a camera, is it recording your child's interactions with it? Are those communications transferred anywhere? To whom, and for what purpose?

2. Is the toy collecting any other information about your child, or transferring it to any company that isn't the manufacturer? Best to find manufacturers and toys that don't share any data at all.

3. How long does the company keep your child's data on file? The company should keep data only for as long as is required to fulfill its play function. If the policy doesn't explicitly state how long the company keeps data, this can be a red flag.

4. Does the company state it is allowed to change terms and conditions without notifying you? This can be a red flag, too.

   Unfortunately, it's possible you won't find the answers to all of these questions in the terms and conditions or privacy policies. These documents can be purposefully vague and omit important information. If this is the case, it's safer to find a different toy made by a company that takes the security of children more seriously.

- Supervise playtime, especially with younger kids. This helps to ensure that if someone hacks the toy and is using it to interact with your child, you can take action immediately.

- Turn it off when not in use. For younger children, store it in a place your child can't reach when playtime is over to ensure they can't turn it on without supervision, re-enabling the toy to pose unmonitored risks.

- Stay on top of security updates. Many web-enabled toys and their companion apps will issue periodic updates. These are important to keep your family safe.