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JFK Johnson Rehab Institute Encourages Awareness of Toy Dangers

Edison, NJ- Experts involved in pediatric and rehabilitative care at JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute are asking parents to be wary of toys that could be potentially harmful to children as they shop this holiday season. Certain toys can present safety issues that can prove to be fatal.

Despite passage of the 1994 Child Safety Protection Act, hazardous toys can still be found on toy store shelves across the country, according to a nationwide toy safety survey by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG). PIRG's research focused on four categories of toy dangers: choking hazards, dangerously loud toys, strangulation hazards or dangerous projectiles, and toxic chemical hazards.

“The noise from toys can be devastating to the hearing of very young children,” says Dr. Virginia Toth, Manager of Audiology at the JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute’s Department of Speech Pathology & Audiology. The dangers are not always evident to the parents or care givers because the adult person holds the toy at arms length. But the infant or young child with much shorter arms and sensitive hearing, brings the toy closer to the ear. This decrease in distance creates louder decibel levels that may do serious and lifelong damage. “Do not expect to find adequate warnings on the toys or their packaging,” says Toth. Noise rules and regulations for toys are non-existent.

Toth goes on to explain that the U.S. PIRG report can serve as a useful guide when making decisions about which toys to select for the upcoming holiday season. “Part of the joy of the holiday season is giving children the toys they dreamed about all year. The last thing anyone wants is for the gift they have taken so much pride in choosing presents itself with a danger to the child or can harm the child in any way.”

Carolyn Weil, LCSW, of the Center for Head Injuries at JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Center stresses the importance of giving a helmet with a bicycle, and a helmet and pads with any scooter, skateboard or skates. According to Weil, “more than 1 million children suffer from traumatic brain injuries (TBIs).” “Helmets can reduce the severity of bicycle related head injuries and parents need to require that kids wear them every time,” Weil says.

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Awareness of Toy Dangers, add one

Some suggestions for purchasing safe toys as recommended by the National KIDS SAFE Campaign include:

- *Avoid toys with small, removable parts. The small parts can pose a choking hazard to children under 3. Also, use a small-parts tester (which can be purchased at a specialty store) to measure the size of the toy or part. If the piece fits inside the tube, it is considered a choking hazard.
- *Don't buy toys that produce loud noises. Toy guns and portable cassette recorders can permanently impair a child's hearing.
- *Also avoid projectile toys. Propelled toys can cause cuts or serious eye injuries.
- *Avoid toys with strings, straps or cords longer than 7 inches. Long strings and cords could strangle a child.
- *Don't buy electrical toys. Electrical toys are a potential burn hazard. Avoid toys with a heating element or electrical plugs for children under 8.
- *Don't buy toy cap guns. Paper roll, strip or ring caps can be ignited by the slightest friction and can cause serious burns.

In keeping toys age-appropriate, here are some guidelines:

- *For infants- activity quilts, stuffed animals without button noses and eyes, bath toys, soft dolls, baby swings, cloth books and squeaky toys.
- *For children ages 1 to 3- books, blocks, fit-together toys, balls, push-and-pull toys, pounding toys and shape toys.
- *For children ages 3 to 5- nontoxic art supplies, books, videos, musical instruments and outdoor toys such as a baseball tee, slide or swing.
- *For children 5 to 9- craft materials, jump ropes, puppets, books, electric trains (after 8) and sports equipment.

Check tape recorders and battery-operated toys regularly for loose or exposed wires. Don't let children change the batteries.

- *For children ages 9 to 14, appropriate gifts include computers, microscopes, table and board games and outdoor and team sports equipment. Make sure older children's toys are kept out of reach of younger children.

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Awareness of Toy Dangers, add two

These suggestions can make an excellent guide for parents to follow when looking over their child's holiday list. However, the most important thing a parent can do to ensure their child's safety is to supervise the child while he or she is playing with a toy, even if the item is recommended for the child's age group. Injuries to children can be prevented most of the time with the use of safe toys *and* proper supervision.

Founded in 1974, The JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute is a major component of Solaris Health System, one of New Jersey's most comprehensive healthcare networks. The JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute headquartered at the JFK Medical Center in Edison is a comprehensive rehabilitative service provider focused on restoring and returning disabled adults and children to optimal function and independence within the community. The Institute offers a complete array of inpatient and outpatient programs and services in rehabilitative health, including stroke, orthopedics, fitness, cardiac, women's health, pediatrics, and brain injury rehabilitation programs and services. JRI includes a 94-bed inpatient center in Edison. Outpatient centers are located in Edison, Metuchen, Monroe, and Plainfield. Affiliated with the JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute is the Shore Rehabilitation Institute, a 40-bed inpatient and outpatient comprehensive rehabilitation hospital located in Brick, NJ. The JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) for its Comprehensive Inpatient Rehabilitation, Brain Injury, and Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation programs. For more information on The JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, call (732) 321-7790 or visit the organization online at <http://www.njrehab.org>.

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