

Don't Toy With *Kids' Eye Safety*



Ralphie's mom had reason to worry in the movie classic, *"A Christmas Story,"* when she warned her young son, "You'll shoot your eye out!" with a BB gun.

In fact, more than 11,000 American children suffer vision-affecting eye injuries playing with toys each year, says Prevent Blindness America. At least half of these accidents could have been prevented.

Whether it's BB guns, toy swords, dart games or similar toys, parents should restrict their children's access to dangerous toys.

VSP network doctor Patricia Perez, O.D., of Chicago, Ill., has seen the results of children's eye injuries firsthand. A 6-year-old patient named Bobby recently lost sight in his right eye after an accident with a sharp toy.

"Unfortunately, Bobby's parents didn't realize that he and his younger brother were playing with an unsafe toy," Dr. Perez says. "The smaller child ran into Bobby while carrying it, and a sharp metal point pierced the cornea in one eye. During the healing process, it became covered with scar tissue, which resulted in loss of sight in that eye."

"The good news for Bobby is that he'll probably be able to receive a corneal transplant when he gets older," she adds. "But that's a difficult procedure and, meanwhile, the child has lost sight in one eye."

"Bobby's loss of vision didn't have to happen," Dr. Perez says. "Experience shows many vision-threatening accidents can be prevented if parents take time to safety-check their children's toys."

VSP network doctor Nancy Davis, O.D., of Highland Village, Texas, agrees: "You really just need to use common sense."

"Check your children's toy box and remove toys that might be hazardous to the eyes," she says. "And remember to avoid buying dangerous toys when shopping for birthdays and holidays."

Here are some helpful tips to use when looking through your child's toy box and when buying new toys:



- **Avoid flying objects such as toy airplanes and bows and arrows.** Never allow unsupervised kids to play with BB guns, firecrackers or darts with sharp points.
- **Read the age labels on new toys and games and follow the guidelines.** Make sure you buy only age-appropriate toys for your child.
- **Choose toys made of sturdy materials without sharp edges or points.** Check them often for eye-threatening wear and tear or broken parts.
- **Look for the letters "ASTM" on new toys.** That means they meet safety standards set by the American Society for Testing and Materials.
- **Read the labels carefully on hobby kits, such as model airplanes and chemistry sets.** These kits sometimes contain substances that are harmful to eyes.
- **Store toys safely when playtime is over.** Eye injuries often happen from toys falling from shelves or toys left on the floor.
- **Think like a child!** Imagine how a child might use a seemingly safe toy in an eye-threatening way.
- **Learn more about toy safety.** Go to KidsHealth, the nation's most visited Web site on child health and safety at: www.kidshealth.org.