



Chemicals in Toys and Children's Health

During this time of year, millions of Americans will be shopping for toys for the holidays. And most of us assume that the toys we buy for our children should be safe and free of harmful chemicals. Despite progress in recent years, some toys and children's products still have the potential to cause harm. Depending on the materials used and the quality and nature of the product itself, the risks for children posed by toys and other products range from poisoning to long-term health effects. In very extreme cases, the consequences can be fatal.

Scientists say that children are particularly at risk when it comes to harmful chemicals and that parents should take steps to protect kids from substances like lead, asbestos, and other chemicals.

33rd Annual Toy Safety Report

For 33 years, U.S. PIRG Education Fund has conducted an annual survey of toys to look for safety problems. This research has led to more than 150 toy recalls and other regulatory actions over the years. Our work has also helped educate the public and policymakers on the need for continued action to protect the health and well-being of children.

Last year, we found toys called fidget spinners that contained high levels of lead, and we convinced Target to remove those particular toys from their shelves. This year, we were happy not to find any toys containing lead. However, we discovered that potentially unsafe toys remain widely available. The problems we found include:

- **Asbestos:** We found asbestos in one popular brand of children's crayons. Asbestos can get into crayons if the crayon manufacturer is not careful with where they buy the talc that is used in crayons. Asbestos is a known cancer-causing substance that can lead to serious health conditions, including lung cancer and mesothelioma. There is a concern that children can inhale asbestos while using these crayons, or that children may chew on the crayons.
- **Boron:** We found significant concentrations of boron in 6 "slime" products. Slime toys are some of the most popular toys this year, with kids excitedly playing with and licking the substance on many Youtube videos online. Many

slime products do not contain boron (nor is boron necessary for great slime). Boron is a substance that can be poisonous to children at high levels, which is why many countries, such as Canada and Norway, have already taken steps to ban or limit the use of boron in slime toys. Several states limit the amount of boron in water to 1 part per million (ppm). By contrast, we found 6 examples of slime with levels as high as 4700 ppm. There is a substantial body of evidence indicating that these levels of boron are hazardous upon ingestion, with side effects ranging from nausea to long-term reproductive damage.

- **Small parts** are pieces that might block a child's airway. Children, especially those under age three, can choke on small parts. Our researchers identified toys that contain small parts, but do not have warning labels when sold online.
- **Privacy-Invasive Toys:** We alert parents and toy givers to so-called "connected toys" that may violate children's privacy and other consumer protection laws.

You can read about these toys in-depth at <https://uspirg.org/feature/usp/trouble-in-toyland> and <https://uspirg.org/reports/usp/safer-school-supplies-shopping-guide>

Toy Safety Tips:

Parents and caregivers can take steps to protect children from potential hazards. We recommend that parents:

- Subscribe to email recall updates from the CPSC and other U.S. government safety agencies available at www.recalls.gov;
- Shop with U.S. PIRG Education Fund's Toy Safety Tips, available at toysafetytips.org;
- Examine toys carefully for hazards before purchase – and don't trust that they are safe just because they are on a store shelf. Check the CPSC recall database at CPSC.gov before buying toys online;
- Report unsafe toys or toy-related injuries to the CPSC at Saferproducts.gov;
- Check crayons for an "AP-certified non toxic" label;
- Review the recalled toys list in this report and compare it to toys in your child's possession.