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CHECK YOUR HOLIDAY SHOPPING LIST TWICE FOR SAFETY

The Wisconsin Optometric Association urges parents to make informed choices and avoid eye injuries to children

MADISON, WI - The holiday season is a wonderful time of year to enjoy with friends and family and is certainly a popular time for parents across the county to purchase toys for their children. While toys and games are a great way to challenge a child's eyesight and sharpen his or her visual acuity, certain toys can pose serious dangers to your child's vision and eye health. As the holiday season approaches, the members of the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) would like to remind parents that some toys can cause serious eye injuries, and urges them to be vigilant in regards to safety when purchasing their child's toys.

"It comes down to common sense," advises Dr. Chris Marquardt, WOA President and Wausau, WI optometrist. "Be proactive and watch for dangerous toys that could injure your children. Better yet, choose gifts that are both fun and enhance children's vision development."

When purchasing toys, the American Optometric Association (AOA) advises that it's important to select well-made toys which are appropriate for the child's age and maturity level. While manufacturers often give suggested age ranges for toys, parents should keep their individual child's development in mind when selecting such gifts, as children do develop at different rates. If buying toys that have a more obvious potential to cause eye injuries in older children, make sure the proper safety equipment is purchased. Toys like slingshots, BB guns, dart guns, and arrows present the most risk, and parents may wish to avoid those gifts completely, especially if younger children are also in the household.

While video games are popular and can be educational, today's electronic devices also give off high-energy, short-wavelength blue and violet light which may affect vision and even prematurely age the eyes. Overexposure to the blue light from handheld video devices and gaming systems can contribute to poor focusing ability, nearsightedness and may lead to serious conditions in later life such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which can cause blindness.

Alternatively, certain toys can help develop or sharpen your child's general eye movement skills, eye-hand coordination, shape and size discrimination skills, and visualization and visual memory skills. The WOA recommends the following age-appropriate toys for children:

- For children 2 years of age and younger – Brightly colored mobiles, stuffed animals, activity gyms, blocks/balls, stacking toys, buckets/measuring cups, puzzles, shape sorters, and musical toys.
- For ages 3 to 6 – Building toys with large snap-together components, pegboards, crayons, finger paint, chalk, modeling clay, connect-the-dot games, and matching shapes toys.
- For ages 7 and older – Jump ropes, target games, more sophisticated building toys and puzzles, remote-controlled toys, and sorting games.

Some toys are simply unsafe and may be recalled by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). For a list of toy recalls and further information on toy safety, visit the CPSC's website at www.cpsc.gov. There are many safe toys on the market today that will not only enhance your children's creativity and personality, but will also allow them to have fun and stay safe while helping to develop and sharpen their vision.

About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Over 620 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's website at www.woa-eyes.org.