

## **TROUBLE IN TOYLAND 2020**

www.ToySafetyTips.org

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#### IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN WHEN

parents, grandparents, caregivers and others feeling generous begin shopping for toys for the kids in their lives. Toy safety has come a long way, thanks to years of work from consumer advocates, public health experts, elected officials and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). These days, examples of dangerous toys contaminated with lead or toys with small parts that pose a choking hazard to young children are more difficult to find in the United States.

Despite this progress, dangerous toys are still on the market. As we approach the ninth month of the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents and caregivers in the United States still work from home while their kids participate in virtual learning some or all of the time. With siblings of all ages playing and spending more time together and parents juggling responsibilities with limited support, some dangerous toys are more difficult

to supervise, and others are better left out of the home altogether.

For each of the last five years, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has documented that U.S. hospital emergency departments treated between 226,000 and 254,000 children with toy-related injuries every year. These numbers could rise in 2020, because kids are spending more time at home, and more of it with less supervision by work-at-home parents.

Most people don't have the equipment to test a toy for toxic hazards such as lead, but other threats are easy to detect when you know what to look for. While certain toys are safe when used by adults or older children, they could be hazardous or even deadly if they accidentally end up in the hands of a younger child.

The 35th annual *Trouble in Toyland* highlights nine categories of dangerous toys and gives tips for caregivers on how to keep their kids safer.

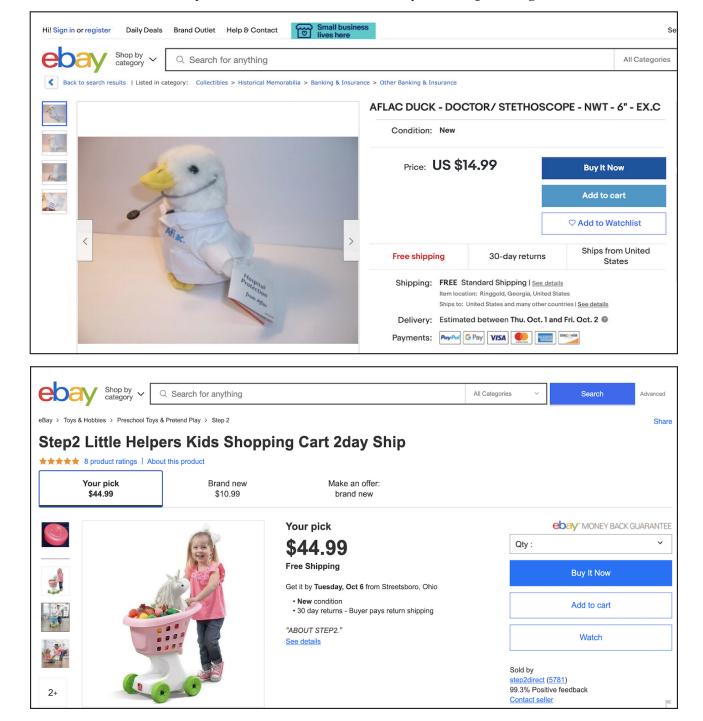


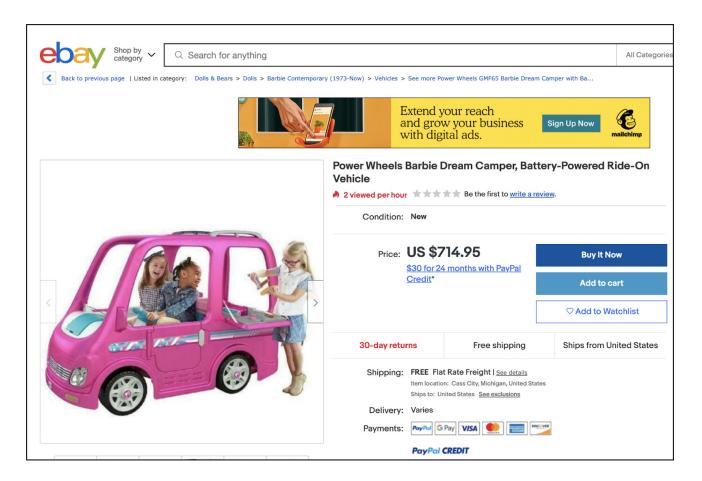


# Recalled toys

Since U.S. PIRG's 2019 *Trouble in Toyland* report, the CPSC announced new voluntary recalls for 10 dangerous toys.<sup>2</sup> From a water gun labeled with lead-laden stickers, to magic wands with detachable choking hazards, these voluntary recalls accounted

for more than <u>800,000</u> units of toys sold in the United States since last November. While recalls help remove dangerous products from store shelves and online retailers' websites, it's not a perfect system and toys can slip through the cracks.





One toy -- a 6" Promotional Aflac Doctor Duck -- was recalled on August 26, 2020, because the toy buttons contained lead levels exceeding the federal standard.<sup>3</sup> Despite this recall, a quick search of eBay in September revealed a full page of this stuffed animal still for sale.

A second recalled item, the Step2 Little Helper's Children's Grocery Shopping Cart, was recalled on February 27, 2020, after the CPSC received 22 reports of the basket breaking.<sup>4</sup> The carts can break into sharp pieces, posing a laceration hazard. Another eBay search uncovered multiple listings for this toy, in both the pink and blue recalled versions.

Beyond the 10 new recalls since our last report, we even found an item that was recalled in *February 2019* still on sale. The <u>Fisher-Price Barbie Dream Camper</u> was recalled because its foot pedal could stick and pose a crash risk to children.<sup>5</sup>

**ADVICE:** When shopping for toys, especially at garage sales and secondhand stores or sites, check to make sure the toy you're bringing home hasn't already been recalled. People may try to resell a product they know has been recalled to get it out of their house, or they may not know the toy isn't safe. A quick search of saferproducts.gov should show whether or not a toy has been recalled.

# **Noisy toys**

Not only can incredibly noisy toys be a serious nuisance when played on repeat, but they can also be damaging to young children's ears. Sound intensity is measured in decibels (dB), and can help predict the risk of hearing loss. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sounds with decibel levels of more than 80 can potentially cause hearing damage in children if they are exposed long enough, and noises between 100 and 120 decibels cause damage if it lasts more than one minute.<sup>6</sup>

Using a digital sound meter, we tested a <u>toy</u> <u>fire truck</u> purchased on Amazon with both flashing lights and noise features.<sup>7</sup> Placing both the toy and decibel meter on the ground 19.69 inches (50 centimeters) apart, the fire truck sounds reached 84.1 dB at their highest point after three tests.<sup>8</sup> While this is potentially dangerous at 19.69 inches'

(50 centimeters) distance, young kids may hold toys close to their head or bend down so that they are eye-level with the flashing lights and sounds. To simulate this kind of play, we measured the sound intensity at 5.9 inches (15 centimeters) and found that it reached 104 dB at its highest point. These are maximum measurements after three tests, which could reflect potential damage to kids' hearing.

**ADVICE:** Excessively noisy toys can cause permanent damage to children's hearing over time and should be avoided when possible. Occasionally, toys offer options for lowering the volume, such as taking out the batteries or switching modes. If none of those options are available, you can place tape over the speaker to muffle the sound.



# Choking hazards

Among the biggest dangers posed by toys are small items that could choke a child. Toys that contain small parts, game pieces or items such as marbles or balls and that are intended for children ages 3 through 6 are required to contain a label warning that the toy is not safe for children under 3 years old.

A <u>small part</u> is anything that fits completely into a CPSC test cylinder that's 2.25 inches long and 1.25 inches wide, which is roughly the size of the throat of a child less than 3 years old.<sup>10</sup> A small part can be a toy, game piece or fragment of a larger toy that can break off easily.

The vast majority of toys that pose a threat are labeled that they contain small parts and aren't intended for children under 3 years old. But that warning label doesn't mean you should just buy the product and let children use it. Use good judgment: Every child is different, so parents and caregivers should thoroughly inspect all toys and products before allowing young children to interact with them.

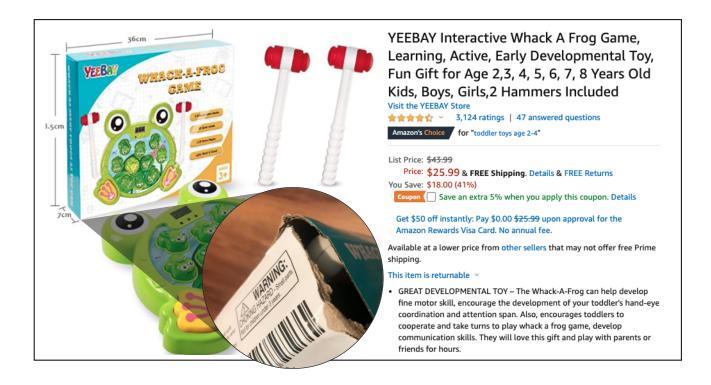
For example, our researchers found a VTech Drill & Learn Toolbox<sup>11</sup> and purchased it in a Target store near Cleveland on Sept. 19, for \$17.99 plus tax. The toy is labeled for children 2 to 5 years old. But it contains four plastic bolts that are 1.75 inches long by .75 inches wide at their widest point. While the screws' shape extends slightly over the edge of the CPSC test cylinder, it is still a near-small part. According to the CPSC's 2006 report on toy deaths, three children died from choking or aspirating on toy nails or pegs. Oversized toy bolts and nails may still pose a choking hazard based on their shape, even if they <u>pass the small</u> parts test, and the CPSC should consider





creating a test that is more protective of children under 3 years old.

Holiday shoppers should also use caution when searching online retailers for suggestions with search terms such as "toys for 2-year-old boys" or "toys for infant girls." These searches can turn up products that are not intended for young children and in fact contain warning labels that they're not for children less than 3 years old. We found several instances of toys listed on Amazon, for example, that were recommended for 2-year-olds, even though further searching revealed they were choking hazards not recommended for children younger than 3.



If you search Amazon for "toys for 2-yearold boys," one of the first results is the YEEBAY Interactive Whack A Frog Game.<sup>12</sup> The online listing doesn't give any warning that it's a choking hazard, even though the box is labeled with a choking warning and says the toy isn't safe for children under 3, as seen in the photo below. Despite the warning labels that appear on the toy's box, the product description itself says the toy is a "Fun Gift for Age 2,3,4,5,6,7,8 years old". A gift giver who's doing a search for "toys for 2-year-old boys" may not see the small "3+" in the bottom right corner of the photo of the toy, and could understandably buy this choking hazard without a second thought.





If you search Amazon for "toys for 2-year-olds," you get tens of thousands of results. We got 40,000 results. Many toys on just the first page say they're actually aimed at children 3 and up. In one example, a Towo Wooden Sorting Toy says it's aimed at a "1 year old baby." But the online listing says it's a choking hazard.<sup>13</sup>

In another example, <u>Lacing Apple</u>
Threading Toys Wood Block Puzzle Travel

Game says it's an "Educational Gift for Gift for 1 2 3 Years Old Toddlers Baby Kids." In fact, the description says it's a choking hazard and is not aimed at children under 3.

In another example, the <u>Top Bright</u> tool set is plastered with its supposed appropriateness for a 2-year-old when the manufacturer's recommendation is actually for 36 months and older.<sup>15</sup> It could be because of the small parts.





#### WARNING:

CHOKING HAZARD—Children under 8 yrs. can choke or suffocate on uninflated or broken balloons. Adult supervision required.

Keep uninflated balloons from children. Discard broken balloons at once.

Other choking hazards include balloons. Balloons are exempt from the small parts warning but must be labeled as a choking hazard for children under 8, who could suffocate on uninflated or broken balloons.<sup>16</sup>

ADVICE: Most toys that contain small parts are labeled as choking hazards. But that's not guaranteed, as we've seen. Gift-givers should use care when purchasing online, even if the toy says it's meant for a 1-year-old or 2-year old. And parents with young children should thoroughly inspect toys, regardless of what the label does or doesn't say. Parents should make decisions based on how they believe their child of any age will interact with the toy.

**POLICY ACTION:** Children have died from toys or parts that pass the CPSC's small parts test; the CPSC should consider creating a test that is more protective of children under 3 years old.

# **Books, crayons and clay**

Just because something doesn't contain a warning label doesn't mean it's safe for young children. Several items commonly used by children are exempt from warning labels -- including books and other products made of paper, writing/drawing items such as crayons, chalk, pencils, pens, watercolors and finger paints and modeling clay.<sup>17</sup> They are exempt because they cannot be made in a way that would prevent them from being broken or torn into small pieces and harming a child who ingests it.

A new concern from the CPSC: The plastic film coverings on some toys that are used to protect mirrors and other surfaces from being scratched or damaged during packing or shipping. The CPSC warns parents and guardians to remove all film coverings because they pose a choking

hazard to children. The <u>CPSC said there are</u> at least two incidents involving children who nearly choked after they peeled the plastic from a Fisher-Price Luv U Zoo Jumperoo and put it in their mouths. <sup>18</sup> The Jumperoo is a bouncer for infants.

**ADVICE:** Carefully check toys, including parts that could easily break off. Evaluate whether toys are appropriate for your children, regardless what the age recommendation is on the box or in advertising.

**POLICY ACTION:** The CPSC should more robustly enforce warning labels and guidance labels.

## | Flocked animals

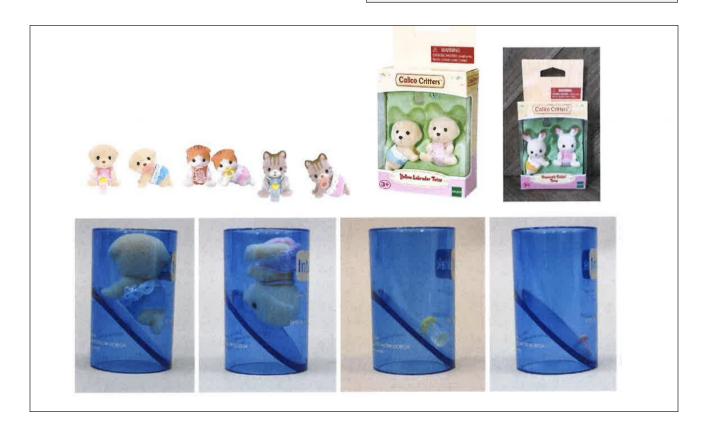
The popular Calico Critters flocked toys and their accessories are labeled for kids ages 3 years and older to comply with the CPSC's Small Parts Regulation. These animal figures are covered in a thin, fuzzy material, and their bright accessories make them appealing. However, they can be deadly in the hands of young children. In fact, these toys and their accessories are suspected in the death of a child in New Mexico according to a court filing, 19 and a near-death incident involving a boy in Utah, according to the Standard Examiner. 20 Both children were under 3 years old and reportedly choked on the same pacifier accessory.

The small parts regulation also bans small parts on "all toys and other articles intended for use by children under 3 years of age," even if they are labeled with an age restriction by the manufacturer. This

clear list of exceptions includes "flocked animals and other figures", and the <u>Calico</u> <u>Critters official website</u> clearly describes their product as "animal figures [ ... ] made of a special flocked material that gives them an endearing quality."<sup>21</sup> The animal figures themselves often meet the definition of small parts, fitting completely into the CPSC test tube for choking hazards.

**ADVICE:** Parents with kids of any age should strongly consider avoiding these products and similar flocked animal figures, especially if there is a younger child also in the house.

**POLICY ACTION:** The CPSC should recall these toys and their accessories as they pose a dangerous choking hazard to young kids.



# Magnets and other items not advisable for children

In September 2020, a 9-year-old boy took two small magnets from a Neutronball building set and put them on his lip, pretending to have a piercing, the CPSC reports.<sup>22</sup> He swallowed them and was later rushed to the emergency room. Doctors tried an endoscopy but were unsuccessful. They gave the boy medications to help the magnets move through his intestines without incident.

Four months earlier, in May, another 9-year-old swallowed three high-powered magnets made by Zen Magnets LLC, the CPSC said. The girl didn't tell her parents until a week later, when she was suffering intense pain caused by her stomach being connected by the magnets to parts of her small intestine, in two places. "She required emergency surgery for this life threatening situation and has now recovered," the CPSC said.

Magnets of many varieties have <u>posed risks</u> to children for years. Some magnets aren't intended for kids; they're more like fidget toys for adults, who can use high-powered "recreational" magnets to create shapes or figures. However, other magnets are parts of toy building sets aimed at children as young as 3 years old. The recreational magnets are typically one-fifth of an inch or smaller. If they're swallowed, these high-powered magnets can link in the digestive system and cause serious or even life-threatening conditions.

The government has recalled various types of magnets over the years and imposed an outright ban on certain high-powered rare earth magnets that was overturned in court in November 2016. The CPSC said there has



been a "statistically significant increase in magnet ingestion incidents and injuries" since then.<sup>23</sup> Still, parents continue to buy magnets for their children, and the <u>CPSC</u> estimates that thousands of children have been treated in emergency rooms because of magnets in the past decade.<sup>24</sup>

**ADVICE:** Parents are urged to keep an eye on magnets or toys with magnets and keep them far out of reach of young children. The <u>American Academy of Pediatrics recommends</u><sup>25</sup> that these products should not be sold at all.<sup>26</sup> If you have high-powered magnets in your home, never allow young children to play with them, and talk with older children about the dangers of being careless and leaving them within reach of their siblings.

**POLICY ACTION:** The CPSC should work with the industry to develop new safety standards, requiring reduced strength of these high-powered magnets.

# In-app purchases

When downloading apps for children on smartphones and tablets, parents should be aware of the risk of overspending through in-app stores or games designed for children that adults would recognize as thinly-veiled gambling. In-app purchases commonly appear in games to help speed up game objectives or access new and fun updates. These can be tempting for young children, but may not be friendly for your wallet.

One app called Coin Master is rated for ages 13 and older, but its kid-friendly animations could appeal to a younger age group.<sup>27</sup> The game includes a virtual slot machine where players are given limited spins in a certain time period and are encouraged to buy more if they run out. The in-app store even boasts a "Best Offer" for the most expensive options of \$99.99.

a child doesn't rack up a large in-game bill is by withholding the account password. Any account with a credit card should not be connected to a child's fingerprint, so a parent has to approve of any purchase before it goes through. To reduce the chance of a child being exposed to gambling via apps, parents should look through the pictures of the apps and look at the reviews before approving of any download. Some use animations and artwork that appear child-friendly but can gloss over that the game is just blackjack or a slot machine.



# Bluetooth-connected toys

Toy manufacturers install Bluetooth devices in a wide variety of toys from watches to teddy bears to karaoke microphones. Unfortunately, Bluetooth toys can be vulnerable to data security issues if they lack an authentication method or a secure network requirement.<sup>28</sup> These loopholes make it possible for strangers to connect to these toys and talk to children in the home or use voice control for security systems or shopping purposes.

Our previous Toyland reports pointed out problems with toys such as a My Friend Cayla doll that had a Bluetooth vulnerability -- a trait shared with lots of Internet of Things items. As part of Cayla's business model, she also collected all kinds of information to send back to the company, likely in violation of the kid privacy law Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)<sup>29</sup>

**ADVICE:** The solution to make these toys safe for your children is a two-step authentication process, including either pressing a button before allowing any device to connect to the toy or confirming which device before connecting. Parents should confirm that any toy with Bluetooth has some type of two-step connection system.

# Gaming console accessibility

With the new PS5 and Xbox Series X and Series S being released this holiday season, people will likely scramble to buy the latest gaming consoles. Parents

may want to ensure that those using the consoles or gaming computers will not be exposed to harmful language or online strangers.

**ADVICE:** Both issues can be solved by using parental controls on family accounts. Those exist for the various gaming consoles and Steam on computers, an online platform to buy, play, create and discuss PC games.<sup>30</sup> Parental controls allow for complete control over access to online games, access to online chats, time spent playing games and money available to spend. To give your children more independence but still alleviate any worries, don't save a payment card

number on the console or computer when buying games, so children will need you to authorize any purchases.

And don't buy a headset for your child to use with a gaming system. Or you should consider prohibiting use of a headset unless an adult is in the room. Headsets allow the user to engage in verbal conversations with strangers. If your kid wants to talk to friends, they can use Discord, Messenger or another group call service.

### Notes

- 1 CPSC Toy-Related Deaths and Injuries reports:
  - https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/ Toy\_Related\_Deaths\_and\_Injuries\_Calendar\_Year\_2018.pdf?WM0sDY9UaFK-2MpzOxpBoqmqPvoUdbzDN#:~:text=In%20 2018%2C%20there%20were%20an,and%20 released%20from%20the%20hospital.
  - https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/ Toy\_Report\_2018.pdf?qIO1DVoYhV6lzYgcLa04K28yF28BOgdS
  - https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/Toy\_Report\_2016.pdf?6ZwpKyiwsEdVzWXhH0m-0doo5cJALIZFW
  - https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/Toy\_Report\_2015\_0.pdf
  - https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/pdfs/ ToyReport2014.pdf
- https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls?combine-=&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=648&field\_ rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=437&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=208&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=240&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=233&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=230&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=244&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=578&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=627&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=750&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=751&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=222&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=221&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=219&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=218&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=217&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=227&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=216&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=215&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=214&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=213&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=212&field\_rc\_recall\_ by\_product%5B%5D=211&field\_rc\_recall\_by\_product%5B%5D=210&field\_rc\_date%5Bdate%5D-=11%2F01%2F2019&field\_rc\_date\_1%5Bdate%5D=

- 3 https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls/2020/ Communicorp-Recalls-Plush-Aflac-Doctor-Duck-Due-to-Violation-of-Federal-Lead-Content-Ban-Lead-Poisoning-Hazard
- 4 https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls/2020/ step2-recalls-childrens-grocery-shopping-cartsdue-to-laceration-hazard
- 5 https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls/2019/Fisher-Price-Recalls-Childrens-Power-Wheels-Barbie-Campers-Due-to-Injury-Hazard
- 6 "Children and Noise: Children's Health and the Environment" https://www.who.int/ceh/capacity/noise.pdf?ua=1
- 7 https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07RLM5HN8/ref=ppx\_yo\_dt\_b\_asin\_title\_o01\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1
  - 8 Tested on Oct. 14, 2020, in Philadelphia.
  - 9 Tested on Oct. 15, 2020, in Philadelphia.
- 10 https://www.cpsc.gov/Business--Manufacturing/Business-Education/Business-Guidance/Small-Parts-for-Toys-and-Childrens-Products
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- 16 https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/103/267.pdf

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- 19 https://drive.google.com/file/d/13rG-2wkGoyBWo8y2rT1xjInlDl8ShFw05/view
- 20 https://www.standard.net/police-fire/farmington-mom-911-dispatcher-hailed-for-saving-choking-toddler/article\_fd79a84e-8d84-5767-992e-98e9f8df3337.html
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- 24 https://www.fairwarning.org/2020/10/safety-agency-tied-in-knots-on-efforts-to-limit-harm-to-children-from-powerful-magnets/?mc\_cid=-d0b560e323&mc\_eid=91a06b986d

- 25 https://www.aappublications.org/news/2017/11/27/Magnets112717
- 26 Melissa Jenco, American Academy of Pediatrics. "AAP, other health groups warn of magnet set dangers", November 27, 2017.
- 27 https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.moonactive.coinmaster&hl=en\_US

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- 28 https://www.which.co.uk/news/2019/12/kids-karaoke-machines-and-smart-toys-from-mat-tel-and-vtech-among-those-found-to-have-security-flaws-in-a-which-investigation/
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- 30 https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/parents-ultimate-guide-to-steam#:~:tex-t=is%20Steam%20Wallet%3F-,What%20is%20Steam%3F,and%20indie%20game%20designers%20alike