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W.A.T.C.H.'s Annual 2020 Summer Safety Report **For Parents and Caregivers**

W.A.T.C.H.'s SUMMER SAFETY TIPS

TO KEEP KIDS SAFE FROM INJURIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

IMPACT INJURIES, SHALLOW WATER TRAPS AND OTHER BACKYARD SAFETY HAZARDS TOP W.A.T.C.H.'S LIST OF 10 POTENTIAL AT-HOME SUMMER SAFETY CONCERNS WITH KIDS

(Boston, MA- June 17, 2020) With kids spending more time playing at home during the Covid-19 pandemic, World Against Toys Causing Harm, Inc. (W.A.T.C.H.) kicks off the summer with important safety information to help parents and caregivers navigate the summer safely.

In this unprecedented time of social distancing to curb the spread of COVID-19, the arrival of warmer weather and summer activities is also the beginning of the new normal. Differentiating this summer from any other year, with many camps and sports cancelled and local playgrounds and community centers closed, more outdoor activities will be closer to home. Consumer Advocates Joan E. Siff, President of W.A.T.C.H., and James A. Swartz, Director of W.A.T.C.H., showcase **10 Top "Summer Safety Traps"** as representative of some of the many different types of hazards families can avoid to safeguard children at a time when kids will be spending more hours than before running, jumping, and swimming close to home. **(SEE ATTACHED LIST).**

The warm weather, combined with school vacation and virtual camps, is a time for **kids to enjoy the outdoors**, but it can also be a time for injuries. During the summer months, traumatic injuries to children more than double.ⁱ Most preventable injuries to children take place near homes and communities, including an estimated 75% (125,300) of injury-related deaths in 2018.ⁱⁱ Siff said, "One concern is that limited summer options will translate into an even greater surge in at-home injuries, so it **remains critical for families to be familiar with what safety traps to avoid to help kids have a fun summer.**"

eCommerce: Stay-At-Home Has Become Synonymous With Shopping Online

During COVID-19, when store closings and stay-at-home orders suddenly transitioned online shopping from a convenient luxury to a necessity, online sales skyrocketed. Almost overnight UPS, Federal Express and Amazon delivery trucks drastically multiplied on otherwise empty roads. In March, eCommerce sales were up 74% compared to the year beforeⁱⁱⁱ. However, when it comes to identifying safety traps for children’s products, e-shoppers need to take precautions. Ordering online, shoppers face the disadvantage of not being able to physically examine the toy at the time of purchase. Some online product descriptions may omit warnings and cautions or provide incomplete or misleading information. Furthermore, unsafe or recalled toys may resurface on second-hand online sites. **W.A.T.C.H. wants to remind the many families relying on online shopping during this time to thoroughly inspect a toy and its packaging for warning signs of obvious hazards before giving it to a child.**

Yard-Based Toys and Sports Equipment: Increased Sales Could Mean Increased Injuries

There is much that parents may not be able to control during COVID-19 and families are relying on manufacturers more heavily than ever to make sure their children’s toys and outdoor recreational equipment are designed with safety as the top priority. As the cooler weather is replaced with rising temperatures, the focus on in-home games popular with kids during quarantine will likely switch to outdoor and yard-based activities. Families interested in avoiding crowded spaces are looking for alternatives to public playgrounds and swimming areas to keep kids active closer to home. Sales of outdoor and sports toys in April increased 51 percent over the same time period last year.^{iv} Ride-on toys, backyard playsets, and pools, to name a few, are among the hot items.

W.A.T.C.H. wants to keep parents and caregivers informed about some popular backyard activities that have been linked to devastating injuries so they can make more informed decisions when choosing products for their at-home, impromptu summer “camps.” It is unacceptable that every year children are unnecessarily injured by defective products that are designed, manufactured or marketed improperly. **“Do not be lulled into a false sense of security that a toy or activity is safe simply because it is popular,”** said Swartz. For many years, W.A.T.C.H. has warned families about the catastrophic injuries associated with **backyard trampolines** including fractures and cervical spine trauma. Adults and teens have been warned not to use popular in-ground water slides, like the traditional **lawn slip and slide**, due to the risk of life-threatening injuries, including paralysis. Other safety hazards highlighted in this year’s Summer Safety Report include **water-related safety traps** and **non-motorized scooters**, a repeat offender associated with the most toy-related injuries. It’s no surprise that with many outdoor summer programs being shut down or going virtual, hospitals have reported a rise in injuries related to trampolines and other activities taking place near home, such as **biking**, whereas normally there may be more fractures related to injuries from organized sports.^v

Backyard Water Traps: Camps May be Virtual, but Water Hazards Remain Real

As families forgo populated pools and beaches to cool down this summer, backyard water safety remains a vitally important issue. Recently, the CPSC reported a steady rise in fatal child drownings.^{vi} Most fatal drownings take place at homes during the summer.^{vii} Almost two thirds of fatal drownings to children occur during the spring and summer months.^{viii} Each year from 2015 to 2017, there were about 379 kids younger than 15 years old who died in pool- or spa-related drownings. In addition, between 2017 and 2019, about 18 children every day (estimated 6,700 children) were seen in hospitals for pool- or spa-related nonfatal submersion injuries.^{ix} The number of children that drown in backyard pools each summer highlights the importance of raising awareness about water safety.

W.A.T.C.H. is alerting parents to be vigilant when kids are near water. **“One of our goals today is to be proactive and raise awareness about water safety, including those hazards that may not be widely known such as water rings that can flip over trapping a child’s head under water, pool floats that can block the view of a child in distress, or baby pools that collect rainwater,”** said Siff and Swartz. It takes just moments for an accident to happen. Checking water safety measures at home is an important way to kick-off the summer.

Safety Spotlight: Toys Are Only Game In Town With Many Sports And Camps Cancelled

Cancellation of group sports and park closings have increased the demand for toys that help keep kids active. Although intended for fun and entertainment, many toys contain hidden hazards unnecessarily putting children at risk of injury or death. **Swartz cautioned, “Unfortunately, we see some of the same potential hazards, hazards that should be well known to the industry, reappear year after year.”** There were an estimated 226,100 toy-related injuries treated at U.S. hospitals in 2018.^x

Addressed in W.A.T.C.H.’s recent **47th Annual “10 Worst Toys” Report** as well as this year’s **Summer Safety Report** are toys that encourage children to jump with the potential for head or impact injuries. **Pogo stick hybrids** with foam bases are one example of toys that may be appealing to keep energetic children occupied. However, some jumping toys are sold without the proper safety gear or marketed with inconsistent safety messages. Other toys, such as **high-powered water guns**, may have the potential to fire with enough force to cause eye injuries. **Water balloon slingshots** remain popular but pose the potential dual threat of blunt force trauma to eyes and choking hazards for young children.

The increased usage of toys and games during the coronavirus pandemic, and families’ increased dependence on the safety of these products, highlights the importance of the safety messages W.A.T.C.H. has been promoting for years. While informing families about the dangers of small parts and other traditional toy hazards, such as toys with long strings and sharp edges sold to

babies, W.A.T.C.H. works year-round to reduce preventable injuries to children. W.A.T.C.H. encourages safer manufacture, design and marketing of products before they enter the channels of commerce and promotes increased transparency and reporting by manufacturers when safety issues arise. Nonetheless, **Siff and Swartz noted every year there are often millions of units of toys recalled for hazards such as choking, strangulation, burns, blunt force trauma, and poisoning, after they have been available for sale.** Already this year in a four-month period, there have been twenty (20) recalls representing over six million (6,008,105) units of toys and other children’s products polluting the market in the U.S..^{xi} One recall is the Musical Lili Llama^{xii} with small parts that could detach, posing a choking hazard. **Swartz said, “During a time when toy usage will drastically increase, immediate action is needed to purge the market of hazards well-known to the industry, like small parts for young children, before even more children are unnecessarily exposed to the risk of harm.”** Recalls are important safety measures, but often occur only after the product is in the hands of unsuspecting children who may suffer serious, even life-threatening injuries. The difficulty in purging the market of goods that have been recalled shows that, while recalls are necessary, they are not a cure-all. **Siff and Swartz advise parents to remember to regularly examine the toys in their child’s toy box.**

Safety: Home Alone But Demanding Safer Products Together

The bottom line is that there are fewer options for summer fun within communities, kids are using more recreational products more often, and families are depending on the safety of these products. However, continued injuries and deaths to children from popular warm-weather backyard activities, drowning, toys with small parts and other hazards reveal the urgent need for increased awareness, safer products, better pre-market testing, and a more responsible market to help prevent injuries. In the meantime, **Siff advised, “Parents can avoid many hazards at home relating to popular toys and recreational activities by remaining vigilant, knowing the facts, and identifying safety red flags.”**

Social isolation does not mean families are on their own when it comes to safety. Through W.A.T.C.H.’s **#SHOUTsafety** campaign and other efforts, W.A.T.C.H. emphasizes the importance of sharing information and raising awareness about products with a track record of injuries and deaths to save lives and reduce preventable injuries. Increased dissemination of timely and detailed information about safety issues allows more consumers to make informed decisions when choosing children’s products and activities.

W.A.T.C.H.’s Summer Safety Report addresses safety traps to consider with the likely increase of yard-based recreational products, sports equipment and backyard water activities so kids can avoid injuries, have fun, and keep cool. **Children’s summer safety in the time of the pandemic is particularly challenging, but the concrete information provided by W.A.T.C.H. can increase awareness and help keep your kids safe:**

- i <https://www.nsc.org/in-the-newsroom/when-it-comes-to-accidental-deaths-united-states-is-approaching-deadliest-stretch-of-the-year>
- ii <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/home-and-community/home-and-community-overview/introduction/>
- iii <https://apnews.com/Business%20Wire/b6847791fbed49af98a47d1dc6293a7>
- iv <https://www.npd.com/wps/portal/npd/us/news/press-releases/2020/the-mpd-group-sales-of-outdoor-and-sports-toys-surge-as-families-take-refuge-in-their-backyards/>
- v <https://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2020/05/29/accidental-injuries-among-children-at-home-on-rise-during-pandemic-chop-research-shows/>, https://www.newswise.com/coronavirus/pediatric-injuries-in-the-home-are-on-the-rise/?article_id=732517
- vi <https://www.cpsc.gov/Newsroom/News-Releases/2020/New-CPSC-Report-Finds-Steady-Rise-in-Fatal-Child-Drownings>
- vii [New CPSC Report Finds Steady Rise in Fatal Child Drownings _ CPSC.gov](https://www.cpsc.gov/Newsroom/News-Releases/2020/New-CPSC-Report-Finds-Steady-Rise-in-Fatal-Child-Drownings)
- viii <https://www.ncfrp.org/wp-content/uploads/NCRPCD-Docs/Keeping-Kids-Safe-in-and-Around-Water-Report-2016.pdf>
- ix [New CPSC Report Finds Steady Rise in Fatal Child Drownings _ CPSC.gov](https://www.cpsc.gov/Newsroom/News-Releases/2020/New-CPSC-Report-Finds-Steady-Rise-in-Fatal-Child-Drownings)
- x https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/Toy_Related_Deaths_and_Injuries_Calendar_Year_2018.pdf?WM0sDY9UaFK2MpZ0xpBoqmqPvoUdbzDN
- xi https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/Toy_Related_Deaths_and_Injuries_Calendar_Year_2018.pdf?WM0sDY9UaFK2MpZ0xpBoqmqPvoUdbzDN
- xii <https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls/2020/Manhattan-Toy-Recalls-Musical-Lilli-Llama-Due-to-Choking-Hazard>