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## **W.A.T.C.H.'s Annual 2021 Summer Safety Report for Parents and Caregivers**

### **W.A.T.C.H. ANNOUNCES SUMMER SAFETY TIPS TO KEEP KIDS SAFE FROM INJURIES AS COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS ARE LIFTED**

#### ***A TIKTOK HIGH-POWERED MAGNET TREND, PLAYGROUND HAZARDS, AND BACKYARD WATER SAFETY TOP W.A.T.C.H.'S LIST OF 10 POTENTIAL SUMMER SAFETY CONCERNS WITH KIDS***

**(Boston, MA- June 21, 2021)** As COVID restrictions are lifted and the world begins to open up again, children are ready to jump into fun this summer. **On this second day of summer, World Against Toys Causing Harm, Inc. (W.A.T.C.H.) shares important safety information to help parents and caregivers navigate the summer safely, especially considering children's injuries typically double over the summer months.**

Families are emerging from a year centered around home and solitary activities, and the **landscape of product-related and recreational activities has changed.** Some activities which slowed down during COVID, such as trips to public pools or playgrounds, may see an increase. Other activities which saw an increase in popularity during lockdown, such as backyard swimming and bicycling, will continue to play a more prominent role in families' leisure time. 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 during the summer when kids will be spending more hours on social media platforms, swimming, and riding. **(SEE ATTACHED LIST).**

The warm weather, combined with school vacation and camps, is a time for **kids to enjoy the outdoors**, but it can also be a **time for injuries.** Swartz cautioned, "We want parents and caregivers to be familiar with heightened safety considerations that may have surfaced with this year's 'new normal'." **During the summer months, traumatic injuries to children more than double.**<sup>i</sup> Most preventable injuries to children take place near homes and communities, including an estimated 75% (125,300) of injury-related deaths in 2018.<sup>ii</sup> Siff said, "One concern is that a surge in certain popular activities will translate into a surge in injuries in those categories, so it **remains critical for families to be familiar with what safety traps to avoid to help kids have a fun summer.**"

W.A.T.C.H. wants to keep parents and caregivers informed about some popular warm-weather activities that have been linked to devastating injuries so they can be armed with that knowledge when choosing at-home activities for children. 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. 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 with this past year's focus on outdoor activities, hospitals have reported a rise in injuries related to trampolines and other activities taking place near home, such as biking.

### **Safety Spotlight: Social Media Influence -- A TikTok Trend and High-Powered Magnets**

During the summer, when there may be an increase in social media use by children, **watch out for potentially unsafe social media trends**, such as an alleged TikTok “fake-piercing” challenge and associated high-powered magnet ingestion injuries.

With organized sports and group activities limited, **the pandemic triggered a surge in the use of social media**. Swartz and Siff cautioned, “The increase in social media use by kids during COVID-19 and the **expected increase in social media use by children with more free time on their hands during the summer** are compelling reasons to stay informed about online trends associated with injuries.” Social media is a significant influence on many children and teens. According to one study, social media use by teens jumped 63% during quarantine. Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok were the top three platforms parents were concerned about.<sup>iii</sup> TikTok’s popularity saw a dramatic increase in the U.S. during the pandemic, growing 180% among 15-25 year old users.<sup>iv</sup>

This year, high-powered magnets have resurfaced as part of a social media trend. In an alleged TikTok “fake piercing” challenge, users pretended to have tongue or cheek piercings using magnetic balls. Last month, a 13-year-old girl reportedly required major abdominal surgery to remove part of her bowel and her appendix after she accidentally swallowed fifteen magnet balls allegedly following a “fake piercing” challenge on TikTok.<sup>v</sup> These magnets can be eight times stronger than magnets that are used in toys. High-powered magnets are a potential safety risk to children — toddler through teen. W.A.T.C.H. has warned of the safety risk that high-powered magnets (whether or not sold as toys) pose to children in the past. Children have been hospitalized and suffered serious harm after ingesting these powerful magnets. Recently, it was reported a 2-year-old boy needed surgery after he swallowed 16 magnetic balls that his older sibling had brought back from school. The magnets stuck together after they were ingested and perforated the boy’s intestines.<sup>vi</sup>

### **Home-Based Activities: Increased Sales Could Mean Increased Injuries**

With increased sales and accessibility of certain products comes a continued need for vigilance when keeping kids safe. For many, a new normal at home includes **more accessibility to in-home exercise equipment or backyard pools and spas**. **Both categories saw an exponential leap in sales this past year**.

#### ***At-Home Exercise Equipment:***

During COVID-19, when gyms and group exercise classes suddenly shut down, many brought their work-outs home. As demand for home exercise options skyrocketed, sales of exercise equipment climbed a sweeping 170% during lockdown.<sup>vii</sup> While many may be venturing back to the gym after a long hiatus, the fact remains that many more homes have exercise equipment than before the pandemic.

This summer, exercise equipment could look enticing to kids looking for fun ways to spend their days now that school is out, but exercise equipment has the potential to be dangerous for children. At home gyms, equipped with treadmills, stationary bikes, or weightlifting racks are not toys, and parents and caretakers need to “exercise extreme caution” when it comes to keeping children away from home gyms. During the pandemic, Peloton more than quadrupled in value<sup>viii</sup> --but it came at a price. After at least 39 incidents and the death of a 6-year-old boy,<sup>ix</sup> Peloton recently recalled 125,000 Tread+ Treadmills. Multiple reports involved children becoming entrapped, pinned, and pulled under the rear roller.<sup>x</sup> W.A.T.C.H. reminds the families who may have increased their home-exercise option during COVID to be diligent in keeping children away from safety traps posed by some fitness equipment and to be aware of important recalls associated with serious injuries.

#### ***Backyard Pools and Spas:***

With many consumers choosing to spend time outdoors near home during COVID-19, demand and sales skyrocketed for above-ground pools, in-ground pools, and spas. Drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages 1 to 4.<sup>xi</sup> Most fatal drownings take place at homes during the summer.<sup>xii</sup> The surge in backyard pool purchases since COVID-19<sup>xiii</sup> and the number of children that drown in backyard pools each summer highlights the importance of raising awareness about water safety this summer.

**(Shallow Water Diving)** An increase in the number of people with access to pools near home, could correlate with an increase in water-related incidents, such as **shallow water diving injuries**. Adding to the importance of awareness about diving injuries this summer is also the drastic increase in boating, an attractive socially-distanced activity during COVID. Many boat showrooms have little, if no, inventory. People have been injured diving into obstructed or shallow water off of boats. In an instant, a single dive can permanently change a life. Diving is the fifth leading cause of spinal cord injuries for men and women.<sup>xiv</sup> Many children and adults do not know the risks of diving into shallow and/or unsafe waters that can lead to catastrophic head and neck injury and even death. Raising awareness about the injuries that have resulted from diving into pools or off boats into shallow water can save lives.

**(Lifeguard Shortage)** The pool- and spa-buying frenzy brought on by families social distancing means there are more options than ever for kids to cool down in their or a neighbor's backyard. Lifeguards may be in scarce supply due to delays in training and other pandemic-related trickle effects. The pandemic has exacerbated a serious lifeguard shortage. Whether you are looking for a lifeguard for a child's backyard birthday pool party, or counting on the lifeguard chairs to be filled at your local beach, a lifeguard shortage is raising red flags.

**(Lesser-Known Water Hazards)** Beware of some of the lesser-known backyard water safety traps to help keep kids safe. Young children can drown in **shallow water** (less than 2 inches). 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. A child can go from having fun in the water to being trapped underwater in an instant— so remain vigilant. Checking water safety measures at home is an important way to kick-off the summer.

### **Out-and-About Again: Safety Considerations With An Increase in Wheeled Activities and a Return to Public Spaces**

As more people are vaccinated and the warmer weather is here, families previously interested in avoiding crowded spaces are looking forward to frequenting public pools, beaches and playgrounds. Reportedly, one out of every three adults feel comfortable returning to public playgrounds.<sup>xv</sup>

Children are on the go with the increased as evidenced by the increased demand and popularity of many wheeled activities. With the onset of COVID, many parents rediscovered biking as a family activity. W.A.T.C.H. reminds parents about the importance of children wearing bicycle helmets while biking and participating in other wheeled pastimes, such as skateboarding and scootering, and the importance of removing bicycle helmets when on the playground.

During the onset of the pandemic, sales of toys with wheels increased, and in many cases so did injuries. In 2020, sales of sports toys, which includes skates, skateboards and scooters, grew more than 31%.<sup>xvi</sup> In one month alone, sales grew 107% versus the same time the previous year.<sup>xvii</sup> March to September 2020, estimated injuries for scooters, skateboards and hoverboards increased significantly by 39% from the previous year.<sup>xviii</sup> Wearing a properly fitted helmet when biking can reduce the risk of injury from a fall and save lives. Wearing bike helmets can reduce the risk of head injury by 60% and brain injury by 58%.<sup>xix</sup>

During a year with an extraordinary increase in cycling, W.A.T.C.H. reminds parents and caregivers that straps from bicycle helmets worn on playgrounds can get caught on equipment leading to death or near strangulation.

Playground entanglement is a risk whether at a public playground or a home playground. Playground Equipment sales had an 81% increase in April 2020.<sup>xx</sup> The CPSC has reported deaths when straps from children’s helmets that snag on playground equipment or other objects.<sup>xxi</sup> Playground injuries are one of the leading causes of unintentional injury to children.<sup>xxii</sup>

**What’s Hot: Staying Safe In An Evolving “New Normal”**

Continued injuries and deaths to children from popular warm-weather backyard activities, drowning, high-powered magnets, 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.”**

Although intended for fun and entertainment, many toys and recreational products contain hidden hazards unnecessarily putting children at risk of injury or death. **Swartz cautioned, “Unfortunately, we see recalls with potential hazards that should be well known by the industry and prevented from more stringent pre-market testing and design practices.”** Already in 2021, there have been seven recalls in the U.S. of ATV, ROV and Off-Road vehicles, totaling 79,826 vehicles that may be in use or in families’ garages. <sup>xxiii</sup> Some of the ATVs recalled were sold for use by children as young as 6-years-old. <sup>xxiv</sup>

The increased injuries seen with increased sales of certain products that increased in popularity during the coronavirus pandemic, highlights the importance of the safety messages W.A.T.C.H. has been promoting for years. While informing families about the dangers of certain recreational activities and toy hazards, 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 and other children’s products recalled for hazards such as choking, strangulation, burns, blunt force trauma, and poisoning, after they have been available for sale.** 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 check for recalls, be familiar with the types of hazards to avoid, and regularly examine toys and other products played with by children.**

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 increase of home-based exercise equipment, recreational products with wheels, and backyard water activities so kids can avoid injuries, have fun, and keep cool. **Children’s summer safety in the time when the “new normal” is constantly evolving due to COVID is particularly challenging, but the concrete information provided by W.A.T.C.H. can increase awareness and help keep your kids safe.**

(See Attached **10 Top “Summer Safety Traps”** For More Information)

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