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W.A.T.C.H.'s Annual 2022 Summer Safety Report

W.A.T.C.H. ANNOUNCES SUMMER SAFETY TIPS: WHAT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS NEED TO KNOW TO KEEP KIDS SAFE WARM WEATHER HAZARDS ASSOCIATED WITH OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL PRODUCTS

*A TIKTOK GEL BALL BLASTER TOY GUN TREND, PLAYGROUND HAZARDS,
BOUNCE HOUSES, AND BACKYARD SHALLOW WATER SAFETY
W.A.T.C.H.'S LIST OF 10 POTENTIAL SUMMER SAFETY CONCERNS FOR KIDS*

Boston, Mass (MAY 25, 2022) As we head into Memorial Day weekend, families are ready to spend time together outdoors. With children's injuries typically doubling over the summer months,ⁱ **World Against Toys Causing Harm, Inc. (W.A.T.C.H.)** shares important safety information to help parents and caregivers navigate the summer safely.

False Sense of Security

Families may be lulled into a false sense of security that a toy or recreational product is safe because it is popular or marketed to children— unfortunately this is not always the case. Knowing what activities have been associated with injuries and deaths in the past, and taking appropriate precautions, can help keep kids safe and save lives this summer.

Summer Safety Hazards and Increased Injuries

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 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, riding, and playing backyard games. (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**. There are many hazards, whether year-round or warm-weather-related, that are linked with serious injuries to children each year. This report highlights a few safety traps to raise awareness about products with hazards that are lesser known, that have been associated with recent injuries, or that have the potential to cause injuries in the future.

During the summer months, traumatic injuries to children increase more than two-fold.ⁱⁱ Most preventable injuries to children take place near homes and communities, including an estimated 78% (156,300) of injury-related deaths in 2020.ⁱⁱⁱ Siff and Swartz caution, “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.**”

What's Hot: Staying Safe In An Evolving Landscape of Summer Activities

Unsafe Social Media Trends

Particularly during school break 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 “Orbeez Challenge” with gel ball blaster toy guns. **Toy water bead blasters may pose the potential triple threat of projectile eye injuries, ingestion hazards for young children when “ammunition” is left behind, and realistic looking toy weaponry.** With other options such as camp and group activities limited due to Covid and staffing shortages, and children spending more time at home, the pandemic triggered a surge in the use of social media. Siff and Swartz said, “The increase in social media use by kids during COVID-19 and the **expected further 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, 63% of teens used social media more during quarantine. Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok were the top three platforms parents were concerned about.^{iv} TikTok’s popularity saw a dramatic increase in the U.S. during the pandemic, growing 180% among 15–25-year-old users.^v The potential for social media trends to have an impact on the health and safety of children was highlighted in last year’s Summer Safety Report as well. A high-powered magnet challenge on TikTok was allegedly associated with serious injuries to older children when they used the magnets to mimic lip and tongue piercings. Small, **high-powered magnets are such a serious potential health risk for children that W.A.T.C.H. is highlighting them as a repeat offender** in this year’s Summer Safety Report to continue to raise awareness about this issue through the summer and beyond. In the last two months, toy blocks with high-powered magnets were recalled due to the risk of “perforations, twisting and/or blockage of the intestines, infection, blood poisoning and death.”^{vi} Injuries from ingesting high-powered magnets can result in often devastating, life-long injuries and death. **Parents should be aware that when a child accidentally swallows high-powered magnets, the symptoms can resemble that of COVID19.** Both prevention and early intervention can mean the difference between life and death when it comes to high-powered magnet ingestion.

Amusement Park Rides

For families with young children as well as teenagers, summer vacation can mean a much-anticipated trip to an amusement park. However, beyond the fun of corn dogs, bottle coin tosses, and meeting a favorite movie character, there are hazards families should consider. Recent amusement park incidents have put more travelers on alert about issues associated with free fall rides and roller coasters and are a reminder of the drastic consequences that can happen when rides go wrong.

Drownings

As a consequence of COVID-19 social distancing, demand and sales skyrocketed for backyard water activities. Drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages 1 to 4.^{vii} Most fatal drownings take place at homes during the summer.^{viii} The surge in backyard pool and spa-buying purchases since COVID-19^{ix} and the number of children that drown in backyard pools each summer highlights the importance of raising awareness about water safety this summer. 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 backyard shallow water and dry drowning hazards,”** said Siff. 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.

Boat Propellers

The increased injuries seen with accelerated sales of certain products during the Coronavirus pandemic highlights the importance of the safety messages W.A.T.C.H. has been promoting for years. **One of W.A.T.C.H.’s Safety Traps is the potential hazards that boat propellers pose to swimmers.** The **unprecedented boom in the number of people participating in boating since the onset of the pandemic has corresponded with an increase in associated injuries.**

Other Summer Hazards

Continued injuries to and deaths of children from popular warm weather backyard activities, drowning, high-powered toy guns, 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.”** Some safety traps the 2022 Summer Report addresses are the potential hazards associated with **motorized and non-motorized scooters, bounce houses that can fly away, bicycle helmet straps that can become entrapped on playground equipment leading to strangulation, and amusement park rides that can turn treacherous.**

Recalls

Informing families about the dangers of certain recreational activities and toy hazards is one of the many ways 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. 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 by more stringent pre-market testing and design practices.”** Swartz and Siff addressed recent recalls of children’s recreational products and toys and the implications on children’s safety. W.A.T.C.H. advises parents in addition to being familiar with the types of hazards to avoid, to remember to regularly check for recalls and examine toys and other products played with by children.

Raising Awareness

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, including **safety traps associated with amusement park rides, fireworks, backyard water activities, and ATV’s,** allows more consumers to make informed decisions when choosing children’s products and activities. While there are many other warm weather hazards parents and caregivers must guard against so kids can avoid injuries and have fun, W.A.T.C.H. highlights ten potential hazards **to begin the summer safety conversation with families. Children’s summer safety in the time when the “new normal” is constantly evolving due to COVID-19 is particularly challenging, but the practical and concrete information provided in W.A.T.C.H.’s 2022 Summer Safety Report can increase awareness and help keep your kids safe.**

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

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- i When it Comes to Accidental Deaths, United States is Approaching Deadliest Stretch of the Year (NSC, June 2018)
 - ii When it Comes to Accidental Deaths, United States is Approaching Deadliest Stretch of the Year (NSC, June 2018)
 - iii Injury Facts: Home and Community Overview (NSC, 2021)
 - iv Parenting Teens in the Age of Social Media (Lurie's Childrens, September 2020)
 - v US children & teens daily screen time COVID-19 2020 (Statista, May 6, 2021)
 - vi <https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls/2022/Boonie-U-S-Recalls-tonies-Blocks-Due-to-Magnet-Ingestion-Hazard-Sold-Exclusively-at-tonies-com-Recall-Alert> (CPSC Recall, March 2022)
 - vii Accident Statistics (Stanford Childrens Health, 2021)
 - viii Pool or Spa Submersion Estimated Nonfatal Drowning Injuries and Reported Drownings (CPSC, May 2021)
 - ix Demand for pools surges for second year amid canceled vacations and long days at home (The Philadelphia Inquirer, April 2021)