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TOYS CONTRIBUTED TO 10,000 EYE INJURIES IN CHILDREN Thousands Hurt and Blinded Every Year by BB and Air Guns

Chicago, Illinois – Every holiday season, millions of children make wish lists and their parents flock to their local malls or toy stores, sometimes waiting in line for hours, to fulfill their little ones' holiday wishes. Often, the desired toys turn out to have many small parts and may be unsuitable, as they are age inappropriate or poorly constructed.

In 2003, more than 10,000 children age 14 and younger were treated in U.S. hospital emergency rooms for eye injuries related to toys. These injuries can result from accidents (e.g., a child tripping over a toy that is left on the floor), unintended misuse of the toy, or an inherent flaw in the toy's design or material.

"The fact is that virtually all of these eye injuries are preventable. You can help keep your children safe by showing them how to use the toys properly, by supervising them if they are very young, and by using sound judgment, rather than following the latest fad, when making a purchase," said Daniel D. Garrett, Senior Vice President of Prevent Blindness America.

"When choosing toys for your children, you need to make sure the toys are well constructed and appropriate for their ability and age," added Garrett. Prevent Blindness America recommends avoiding toys that shoot projectiles, such as air and BB guns – they contribute to a large number of serious eye injuries including blindness, and sometimes result in deadly accidents. In 2003, 1,700 eye injuries occurred in children age 14 and younger related to toy weapons, BB guns, slingshots and other propelled toys.

Today's BB guns are a lot more powerful than what parents remember receiving in their youth. Some of these guns can shoot with a velocity close to a .22 caliber rifle, which is why Prevent Blindness America warns parents to not buy them for their children. "There are many better gift choices, but if one of these "toy" weapons happens to be on your child's wish list, it helps to sit down with them and explain the dangers and how important their safety is to you," said Garrett.

Prevent Blindness America offers the following tips to help make this holiday season a safe one for children:

- Inspect toys for safe construction. Products given to young children should be made of durable plastic or wood with no sharp edges or points. The toys should

be able to withstand impact. Avoid purchasing toys for young children with small parts, as they tend to put items in their mouths, increasing their risk of choking.

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- Check your children's toys regularly for broken parts. Throw broken toys out immediately if they cannot be safely repaired. Older kids often alter their toys and misuse them, making them unsafe. It is better to be vigilant, even with older kids, so that serious eye injuries can be prevented.
- Read the instructions and the suggested age level on the packaging. Assess whether the item is appropriate for the child's ability and age. Age labeling is provided not just for developmental reasons, but for safety reasons as well.
- Look for the symbol ASTM F963. This indicates the product meets the national safety standards set by the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM).
- Make recommendations to family members and friends about gifts that you feel are appropriate for your child.
- Remain aware of recalled products. Large toy retailers post regular notices of recalled toys usually at the front of stores. Take recalled products back to the store where they were purchased for a full refund. For further information on toy and product recalls, visit the U.S. Product Safety Commission website at www.cpsc.gov.

Prevent Blindness America offers two free fact sheets, ***Tips for Choosing Safe Toys***, and ***Most Dangerous Toys to Children's Eyes***, hoping to reduce the number of toy-related eye injuries that occur among children during the holiday season and throughout the year.

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to receive a free fact sheet, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the web at www.preventblindness.org.

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