

Consumer Awareness: Toy Safety & Halloween

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Background

With Halloween just around the corner, many consumers will be purchasing fancy dress costumes and associated items for their children to celebrate the occasion. Fancy dress costumes and items intended for play for children under the age of 14 are usually classified as toys and, as such, must conform to rigorous safety standards that ensure childrens' safety. Many consumers may also already be thinking of what toys they will be purchasing their children for Christmas.

The Office of Fair Trading is issuing this guidance document to raise awareness of the dangers of purchasing unsafe toys and to assist consumers to identify and avoid them.

The key messages of the campaign:

1. **Check labelling** for genuine safety certifications, such as '**CE**' and '**UKCA**' markings;
2. Take special care with products containing **button cells** and **magnets** as they are very **dangerous for children**;
3. Buy **age-appropriate** items for your child and avoid **choke hazards**;
4. Always buy costumes and toys from **reputable sellers** and **legitimate sources**; and
5. During Halloween **keep children in fancy dress away from naked flames**.

What to look out for when shopping for toys:

When buying a toy there are lots of simple checks you can carry out to determine how safe a toy is and protect the safety of your child. We recommend that consumers consider the following when buying toys for Children:

1. Check for safety markings

Toy safety markings provide a very good gauge of how safe a toy is for your child. The most common one is the EU's '**CE**' marking. For more information about these markings and what they mean see the '**Safety Markings**' section below.

2. Button cell batteries – Major Hazard!

Button cell batteries are one of the most significant and dangerous safety hazards for young children. Not only are they a choke hazard because of their size, they can do serious internal damage if swallowed. Saliva combined with the electrical current causes a chemical reaction that can cause severe burns. Checking for button cell batteries is therefore very important. A toy that conforms with appropriate safety standards will have button batteries enclosed in lockable compartments that cannot be opened

by children. If you ever suspect that your child has swallowed a button battery, seek medical help immediately.

For more information on this major hazard visit: <https://www.rospa.com/home-safety/advice/product/button-batteries>

3. **Magnets – Major Hazard!**

Not only are loose magnets a choke hazard, if swallowed, they can stick together and cause serious and at times life-threatening damage to childrens' digestive systems. Many toys contain magnets. If they do, make sure these cannot be detached from the toy and swallowed by your child. If you ever suspect that your child has swallowed a magnet, seek immediate medical help.

For more information on this major hazard visit: <https://www.rospa.com/home-safety/advice/product/magnet-safety>

4. **Choke hazards**

Check whether a toy, or its parts, can cause a choking hazard by simply pulling and tugging at the the toy before giving it to your child. Babies and toddlers should not be given any toy (or a detachable part of a toy) that can fit in their mouth. Usually if the item easily fits inside a toilet paper roll it means that the toy is unsafe for a child that's younger than 3 years old. Note that latex balloons can also pose choking risks to younger children.

5. **Age and size suitability**

If you also have older children remember to keep their toys out of reach from the younger ones. Toys should be appropriate for your child's age and size. While the 'Age Warning' mark (see 'Safety Markings' below) is there to show what toys are suitable for children under three, all children develop differently so also take your own child's ability into account. Outdoor toys such as bicycles that are too large or small for a child can also easily lead to unnecessary accidents and falls.

6. **Who are you buying from?**

Toys manufactured and/or imported through UK and the EU must comply with high safety standards. Toys that come from other countries, most notably China, may not. Be wary of cheap toys that may save you a pound today but can cause your child harm tomorrow:

- Only buy from reputable traders, particularly when purchasing online.
- Be wary of fakes as these products do not undergo rigorous testing before being placed on the market and may therefore catch fire, fall apart, contain dangerous chemical content or pose choking hazards.
- Check the toy's packaging and labels as these should contain the manufacturer's or importer's name (or trademark) and address. If they do not, they may not be safe.
- Ensure the product is accompanied by safety information and instructions where applicable.

7. **Second hand toys**

If buying second hand toys inspect them for wear and tear to ensure that they do not have any broken parts or sharp edges that could cause your child harm.

The biggest dangers during Halloween

1. Flammable costumes - Major Hazard!

Children should always be kept away from fire however the risks of injury, or worse, increases substantially where a child is in an unsafe fancy dress and close to naked flames often used as Halloween decorations. Note that fancy dress costumes can have trailing fabric that can easily catch fire. Furthermore, if they do not conform with the strict flammability standards applied to 'CE' and 'UKCA' marked toys they risk igniting and spreading quickly.

Note that costumes intended for adults, do not have to comply with these requirements.

2. Candles

Consider using battery-operated candles as this reduces the risk of fire. Note however the advice relating to button batteries being accessible to children above. If using tea lights, keep these in a glass jar for extra protection.

3. Novelty lights

These are usually used during Christmas but their use is growing in popularity during Halloween too. Limit the risk of fire in your home by buying safe electrical products with a 'CE' and or 'UKCA' marking (see 'Safety markings' below) and using the products responsibly.

4. Halloween contact lenses

Only buy these from registered opticians to avoid possible complications.

Safety Markings

There are several symbols and safety marks that you might find on a toy or children's fancy dress. Each one is important for different reasons. The symbols indicate that the toy you are buying complies with all relevant safety standards.



'CE' marks - Products with this marking are tested for conformity with minimum EU health, safety and environmental standards before being placed on the market. Children's costumes (including wigs, masks and other such accessories) are classed as toys and should bear the 'CE' marking. Facepaints marketed for children should also carry the 'CE' marking. Watch out for fake CE markings however! See 'How to spot a fake 'CE' mark' below.



'UKCA' mark – Similar to the 'CE' mark The 'UKCA' mark has been introduced in the UK following Brexit. This mark will be displayed on products which are in conformity with applicable UK standards. Therefore consumers may now find products displaying either the UKCA mark, the EU's CE mark or both.



Age-appropriate marks - Toys that may be dangerous for children under three may contain this graphic. There should also be a brief indication (which may be found in the instructions) of the specific danger, that warrants this precaution. Children under the age of three are particularly susceptible to choking on small detachable parts.



Lion Mark- British Toy & Hobby Association ('BTHA') members can display this mark on their toys. Members of the BTHA follow a code of practice that ensures that not only they meet current UK legislation across a range of issues from safety to advertising, but often surpass the legal requirements in order to meet the best practice guidelines that make up the code.

How to spot a fake 'CE' mark

The 'Chinese export' mark is very similar to the EU's 'CE' mark but is not an official European mark. Both can be easily confused. It is important for consumers to know the difference between the marks as Chinese goods may not have to comply with the same safety standards than in the UK or EU . A toy that only has the 'Chinese export' mark doesn't guarantee that it conforms with standards designed to keep children safe during play. Use the following image to spot the difference:



Note that the 'CE' mark's letters are placed further apart from each other than that of the China Export mark. Also note the middle line of the 'E' on the genuine 'CE' mark is shorter than the top and bottom lines. Some genuine 'CE' marks have 3 equal lengths on the 'E'.

Check for product recalls

Check the item you are buying has not been recalled from the market for not conforming to safety standards:



1. [Safety Gate, the EU rapid alert system for dangerous non-food products](#);
2. The UK's Chartered Trading Standard's (CTSI) [Product recall and safety notices database](#); and
3. The UK Office for Product Safety and Standard's (OPSS) [Product safety alerts and reports](#).

The OFT posts weekly updates of goods that have been recalled on social media.

Contact us

If you have any queries or require assistance please contact the OFT's Consumer Protection Team:

Email: consumer.protection@gibraltar.gov.gi

Tel: 20071700

Web: www.oft.gov.gi

Or to place a complaint with us, use our online form: <https://www.oft.gov.gi/complaints>

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