

EYE-Q

by R. Thomas Barowsky, MD

You'll Shoot Your Eye Out Kid!

These prophetic words from the movie "The Christmas Story" are ingrained in every parent's mind when their youngster starts thinking about how cool it would be to get a BB gun or air rifle for Christmas. Having survived Black Friday and Cyber Monday, the holiday shopping season is in full swing. I thought a few words of wisdom on selecting "eye safe" gifts might be helpful.

Since we don't typically worry about lead poisoning when it relates to eye safety and since the experts have already beaten it to death, I'll leave that discussion alone. What I'd like to talk about is some common sense observations on eye safety at Christmas time.

It is obvious that any gift that consists of small or large flying objects, whether propelled by a coiled spring, compressed air or rubber bands, has the potential to cause serious unintentional harm to the eye. Even the "safe" toys such as foam rockets and balls, ping-pong balls etc, all carry some risk of injury to someone on the wrong end of the toy. I recently saw an ad for a toy gun that will shoot up to three sponge tipped projectiles at a time. Imagine the amount of injury you could cause playing inside on a cold day with that marvelous toy.

When I was a kid my deepest wish was to get the Lone Ranger matched pistol set with roll caps for authentic gunfight sounds and action. Even these toys carried a certain amount of risk for the shooter. As the roll caps exploded there was always the risk of paper debris flying into your eyes if you held the gun too close to your face. When we graduated to BB guns I think it nearly sent my Mother over the edge. Her sons were going to kill each other or at least lose an eye before it was all over. Fortunately, that didn't happen because we were taught to properly respect any kind of firearm in our possession along with a stern warning from our Dad of what to expect from him if the rules were ignored (always very effective).

Remember also that Christmas time is a time when we may not think as clearly about the things around us. Running into the Christmas tree could mean a nasty scratch to the eye from the pine needles. If you have a real tree there is also the risk of getting a serious infection from whatever happens to have taken up residence on the needles including bacteria, fungi and molds. Hanging decorations may seem out of harms way when you put them up, but if you are 5'4" tall and your cousin is 6'4" tall he may be right at eye level with your pretty and pointy decorations. Don't forget that aerosolized gifts such as body sprays and perfumes, Silly String or a whole host of other fun products can be accidentally sprayed in the eyes if you're not careful.

A few words to the wise about eye safety will help to keep the holidays happy and healthy.

BB guns, air rifles and pellet guns are not toys and should be treated as the weapons they really are.

Proper firearm handling instruction by a responsible adult or parent even with a BB gun, air rifle or pellet gun is vitally important.

Always wear safety glasses when shooting BB guns, air rifles and pellet guns.

Never point something with any kind of projectile at anyone for any reason even if it has a soft sponge tip. Scratches on the eye are very painful and can cause additional problems later on.

Watch where you point that spray bottle of perfume. You might think its funny to have your brother or boyfriend smell like one of your girlfriends but he may not and end up with an eyeful of your favorite scent. That goes for you guys too. Not everyone wants to smell like your body spray.

Watch out for decorations and ornaments that, left unattended, could cause an injury to people who are not paying attention.

Next week I'll post my annual emergency eye care column so that you will be prepared for nearly any type of eye injury that may try to disrupt your holiday celebration.

If you have questions about your eye health e-mail Dr. Barowsky at doctom@tdkj.com and we'll try to answer your questions here at Eye-Q.