



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
December 23, 2003

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### **DOH ISSUES HOLIDAY SAFETY REMINDERS**

**TALLAHASSEE** – Florida Department of Health (DOH) officials remind Florida residents and visitors to put safety first during the holidays.

“These festive times with family and friends should involve precautions with food and gifts to help ensure celebrations are both joyous and safe,” said Florida Department of Health Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A. “Holiday feasting should center around the four, basic food safety steps -- clean, cook, chill and separate.”

Agwunobi recommends the following guidelines for **safe food handling**:

- Wash your hands before preparing or eating food, after using the bathroom or changing a diaper, after handling uncooked food, after playing with a pet, after handling garbage, after tending to someone who is sick or injured, after blowing your nose, and after coughing or sneezing.
- When defrosting frozen foods, it is best to thaw the food in the refrigerator where it will remain at a safe, constant temperature of 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below. If that is not possible, food can be defrosted in the microwave, or by running cold water over the food item.
- When preparing foods, follow the appropriate temperature guidelines for defrosting, cooking and cooling.
- Store leftovers within two hours of cooking.
- When in doubt, throw it out.

For additional food safety information, call the toll-free USDA/FSIS Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854. Food safety specialists (both English and Spanish speaking) are available from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. EST on weekdays year-round. The hotline is closed on federal government holidays.

For more food safety information, please visit:

[www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

[www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/holiday.html](http://www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/holiday.html)

[www.fightbac.org/holiday\\_fact.cfm](http://www.fightbac.org/holiday_fact.cfm)

[www.eatturkey.com/consumer/main.html](http://www.eatturkey.com/consumer/main.html).

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## **Toy Safety Reminders**

Agwunobi and the Florida SAFE KIDS Coalition urge holiday shoppers to keep safety in mind when purchasing toys this season. Although the majority of toys are safe, they can become dangerous if misused or if they fall into the hands of children who are too young to play with them.

“As you are purchasing toys this holiday season, please remember that your children can easily choke on small toys or even small parts,” cautions Agwunobi. “You should consider whether the toy is appropriate for the child’s age and whether the gift requires protective gear accessories such as helmets and knee pads.”

The following precautionary tips are recommended when selecting gifts this holiday season:

### **Select Safe Toys**

Each year more than 202,000 children ages 14 and under are treated in hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries. Innocent-looking toys—such as marbles and balloons—present a choking hazard to small children. The Child Safety Protection Act, a federal toy labeling law, requires manufacturers to place warning labels on toys that pose a choking hazard to young children.

### **Follow Age Recommendations When Selecting Toys**

Many toy-related injuries occur when parents overestimate their child’s ability to handle a toy designed for an older age group. Age recommendations for toys not only take into account a child’s cognitive abilities, but they also consider the overall safety of a toy. Be especially aware of safety labeling on a toy’s packaging, such as “this toy is not appropriate for children under 3.”

### **Include Proper Protective Gear**

Bicycles, in-line skates, scooters and skateboards are also popular gifts for the holidays. However, without the proper protective gear or skills, injury and death can occur. Each year in Florida, children 14 years of age and under die as a result of bicycle-related incidents. In 2000, injuries resulting from bicycles, skateboards, and in-line and roller skates accounted nationally for well over half a million emergency room visits from children ages 14 and under.

For more information about toy safety, please visit the SAFE KIDS website at [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org).

The Florida SAFE KIDS coalition is part of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, the first and only national organization dedicated solely to the prevention of unintentional childhood injury—the number one killer of children ages 14 and under. Over 300 state and local SAFE KIDS Coalitions in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico comprise the campaign.

### **Potential Dangers Associated with Exotic Pets**

If giving reptiles for gifts, be aware they can also pose a health risk to owners by transmitting *Salmonella*. Lizards, snakes, turtles and other amphibians and reptiles all carry and shed the bacterium, which causes a diarrheal illness in humans.

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“You don’t have to touch the animal itself to get Salmonella,” Agwunobi said. “You can get it by touching something the reptile touched.” Because minimal indirect contact can lead to illness, reptiles and amphibians should be kept out of child care centers and households that include young children under five years old.

Most people infected with Salmonella develop diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps 12 to 72 hours after infection. The illness usually lasts 4 to 7 days, and most people recover without treatment. Others, including children less than five years old, the elderly and people with impaired immune systems, are at greater risk of acquiring reptile-associated salmonellosis and are more likely to suffer severe complications, including meningitis and septicemia, both life-threatening conditions.

To reduce the risk of salmonella transmission, Agwunobi recommends that children and adults thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water after handling these animals and any objects that they have come into contact with.

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