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FAMILY MATTERS

PARENTING WITH LISA SALMON



TOYS THAT PASS THE PLAY TEST

CHRISTMAS shopping is in full swing and as parents scour the internet for gift ideas, Asda has helpfully released a range of toys that - for the first time ever - has been chosen entirely by children. Some 400 boys and girls, aged 18 months to 12 years, from across the UK, were invited to help the supermarket put together a giant selection of over 100 top toys.

Asda toy buyer, Kate Briggs said: "We decided it was time to turn to the real experts - meaning Chosen by Kids features the latest toys, but not at the expense of old favourites."

But what are the top 20 toys? Well, there are some brands you would definitely expect - Nintendo's new 2DS XL, Lego's Ninjago Fire Mech and The Batmobile, Baby Annabell and Barbie, along with some eye-boggling big stuff, like the Nerf Battle Racer go cart and Dareway Revolution Ride On (like a Segway for kids).

Happily, there are some innovative ideas too. Laser X allows you to recreate LaserQuest in your own home and Soundmoovz are funky little speakers that you wear on your wrists and ankles, and they only play music when you dance.

But never mind the small people - what about the older folk who are going to have to shell out for all this? We asked real parents what they thought about some of the top 20 toys...

● **Lego Ninjago - Fire Mech - 70615, £50** (currently reduced from £59.97)

"Lego is always a great gift and a brilliant way to get parents involved," says Catherine Fletcher, mum-of-two.



● **Laser X 2 Player Pack, £45**

"I really like this," says mum-of-two, Tonia Prestney. "It's cheaper than the competition, great for children's parties and you can use it indoors or outside."

● **Barbie DreamCamper, £67** (currently reduced from £99.99), pictured.

"I already know how much my kids want this as they've told me all about it," says Claire Richardson, who has two daughters.



"They're particularly excited about the teeny-tiny marshmallows Barbie can toast on the campfire."

● **Paw Patrol Jungle Patroller, £50** (currently reduced from £64.97)

"This is like the new Optimus Prime!" Martyn Blanchard, dad-of-one, says. "Every child aged five and under would love this."

● **Nikko Air DRL 115 Air Elite Drone Race Set, £50**

"This looks fantastic!" Martyn Blanchard says. "An affordable and capable drone for children."

ADVANCES MEAN HIV NO LONGER DEADLY

HEALTH

With Dr Zak Uddin



Dr Zak discusses advances in one of the biggest health problems of our time - HIV and Aids

DESPITE HIV and Aids having awareness dates in the calendar (November 18 to 24 was National HIV Testing Week, while World Aids Day fell on December 1), it is clear that perhaps the most stigmatised illness ever has now obtained the coverage it so needs.

Yet despite it being 30 years since the Don't Die of Ignorance campaign, fears and lack of understanding about HIV, as well as prejudice towards sufferers remains an issue, even in such progressive times.

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It is a blood borne virus, which is transmitted through unprotected sex, sharing contaminated needles and other drug equipment. Before testing of blood donations became routine in the early 1990s, some people sadly caught HIV from blood transfusions. You cannot get HIV from normal social contact, including shaking hands, cuddling, public toilet seats or even mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

If exposed to HIV, many people will develop flu like illness within two to six weeks, as the body tries to fight the infection. However, after this, there may be no symptoms whatsoever, sometimes for more than ten years. Unfortunately, during this



LEADER'S EXAMPLE: First Minister Nicola Sturgeon is given an HIV test by George Valiotis, chief executive of HIV Scotland, ahead of World Aids Day

Picture: Jane Barlow/PA Wire

time, HIV progressively damages the immune system, the body's natural defence against infection and cancer. When this destruction reaches a critical level, the person will develop one of 20 or more diseases, which are said to be Aids defining illnesses. Sadly from here, progression to ill health and death can be very rapid. Also, persons who are unaware of their HIV status may unknowingly infect others.

Thankfully, the invention of anti-retroviral therapy (ART) has revolutionised the treatment of HIV to such an extent that if diagnosed early and medication started promptly, many sufferers will not go on to develop Aids, and many today can expect to have

the same life expectancy as someone without HIV. The aim of ART is to reduce the level of HIV in the blood, known as the viral load, until it cannot be detected. This prevents further damage to the immune system, as well as greatly reducing the chances of HIV transmission; enabling infected mothers to have normal deliveries and even to breast feed their babies without passing on the virus. Although there is no cure for or vaccine to prevent HIV at present, what was once a death sentence has been transformed into a very manageable condition.

Avoiding high-risk encounters is always advised. The tag line of this year's Awareness Campaign,

"Give HIV the Finger" refers to the fact that you can now be tested for the virus with a simple finger prick blood test, or a saliva sample, with a same day result. Any positive result would need to be verified with a further test, but with Sexual Health Centres offering walk-in clinics, and self-test kits available to purchase online, knowing your status is easier than ever before. A negative test will put your mind at rest, but equally a positive result, if found early, is not the death sentence it once was.

Useful websites
www.nat.org.uk
www.tht.org.uk
www.unaids.org

It may be best to get that hernia repaired

Q: My son aged 57 has just developed a hernia, and is quite concerned about this. The doctor says to leave it alone and just live with it. I know he is not happy about it and would prefer to have it treated, especially as he does quite frequently lift heavy equipment and units. What is your opinion about hernias - Elsie

A: A hernia is defect or hole in the abdominal (tummy) wall. These can occur in the groin, or on the abdomen itself; typically near the belly button. The abdominal wall is a container for the bowels. The concern is that if a loop of bowel pops through the defect, it may

not fall back in; which becomes an emergency situation. Many would advocate repairing hernia in healthy people. Sometimes an ultrasound scan of the area will show how big the hole is and help in any decision regarding an operation to repair it.

Q: I am worried that I have coeliac disease, and after removing gluten from my diet, I feel so much better. I wanted a blood test for coeliac, but was told that I need to start eating gluten again. Is that correct? - John, 44

A: Coeliac disease is due to intolerance of gluten; a protein

found in the cereals wheat, barley and rye. Your body thinks that gluten is a harmful product, so it forms antibodies to fight it off. Unfortunately these also damage your small bowel, so it cannot absorb the important nutrients from food. This leads to problems including anaemia and osteoporosis (thinning of the bones).

Excluding gluten before being tested means the level of antibodies will drop, so they may not be detected in your blood. A positive blood test will still require a biopsy from your intestines to confirm you have coeliac disease.

● If you have a question for Dr Zak, please email: askdoctorzak@gmail.com
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Dr Uddin's advice is provided in good faith and in accordance with currently accepted evidence. However, this content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You should always seek the advice of a GP, or other qualified health provider, regarding a medical condition.