



Button batteries a potentially deadly danger to children

by Catherine Holland

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Posted on May 15, 2012 at 12:29 PM

Updated Tuesday, May 15 at 1:31 PM

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PHOENIX -- If you have a remote control, chances are you have at least one **button battery**, also known as a button cell, in your home. If you have button batteries, your young child could be in very real danger.

We all know young kids put things in their mouths. Sometimes they swallow things. More and more **kids are swallowing those small button batteries** -- the number of cases has quadrupled in a decade -- and the results can be fatal.

While a swallowed battery will often make its way through the body and be passed harmlessly, there are cases in which it gets stuck. That's where the danger lies.

Dr. Craig Egan from Phoenix Children's Hospital has seen far too many of these cases. The longer the battery is lodged inside the child's body, the more serious the injuries become.

Early symptoms can be so mild that a child you has swallowed a button battery might to have a simple cold. But what starts with sniffles and perhaps a slight fever can quickly escalate. "It could be nothing very dramatic until a few days later," Egan said.

"An electrical current can form around the outside of the battery, generating hydroxide (an alkaline chemical) and causing a tissue burn," according to the **National Capital Poison Center**.

If not removed quickly, the battery can burn a hole in the esophagus or stomach. Those who survive can face serious health issues, some of which, like difficulty breathing or vocal-cord damage, might be permanent.



One of Egan's patients, **Emmett Rauch**, swallowed a button battery in October 2010. He's had 19 surgeries, many of them lasting several hours, since then. That's not a typo -- 19 surgeries. Emmett still breathes through a tracheal tube and he's fed through a tube in his belly.

"They did not initially know about it because his symptoms were so vague," Egan said. "The cough, the fever is something that every parent deals with on a daily basis almost."

Emmett's parents are determined to spread awareness about the potentially deadly threat lurking in many, if not most, homes.

"We feel as his parents our mission is to create awareness of the extreme dangers of button batteries" wrote Emmett's mom, Karla Rauch, on the Emmett's Fight website she and her family created. "They are so prevalent in our daily lives"

According to the National Capital Poison Center, more than 3,500 people -- most (but not all) of them children -- swallow tiny button batteries every year.

In a new study released in the **journal Pediatrics** Monday, **Dr. Gary Smith, Samantha Sharpe and Dr. Lynne Rochette** said button batteries accounted for 2,785 ER visits by children nationwide in 2009, up from 1,301 in 1990.

"Batteries pose an important hazard to children, especially those 5 years of age [and younger]," wrote Smith and his team in their study conclusion. "The increasing number and rate of battery-related ED [emergency department] visits among children underscore the need for increased prevention efforts"



Doctors and child-care experts say it's essential to keep button batteries, which are generally the size of a quarter or smaller and found in all sorts of electronics, out of your child's reach. It's best to keep them locked away where little hands can't find them and where they cannot be spilled.

If your child does start to develop symptoms, don't make the easy assumption. Check and see if any batteries are missing.

If you think your child might have swallowed a battery, take him or her to the emergency room immediately. Time is of the essence as a swallowed battery can do serious damage in as little as two hours.

If you can, give the medical team the identification number from the battery's package or from a matching battery. This will help them know what they're dealing with and how to proceed.

Although it might seem like a logical step, **do not induce vomiting**. That could make the problem worse. Also, do not let your child eat or drink anything until a chest X-ray can be done.

The National Capital Poison Center says button batteries also can cause permanent damage if placed in the nose or ears, something else for which kids are known. As with swallowed batteries, a trip to the emergency room is in order. Do not use nose or ear drops until you know if there's a battery involved.

For more information, call the **National Battery Ingestion Hotline** at 202-625-3333. You can even call collect if needed. You also can call the American Association of Point Control Centers at 1-800-222-1222.

For more information about the Rauch family and Emmett's Fight, visit **EmmettsFight.com** or the **Emmett's Fight Facebook page**.

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