

HEALTH

Small but Deadly: Swallowing Button Batteries Can Be Fatal for Kids

Battery injuries are on the rise among kids, and in many cases button batteries are to blame.

By [Jeannine Stein](#) August 31, 2012 [Comment](#)



Battery-related injuries in kids have been on the rise in the U.S. since 1998, the CDC reports. (Photo: Marc Soler/Getty Images)

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Without them our cameras wouldn't flash and our flashlights wouldn't glow. But if swallowed, button batteries can cause serious injury and even death in children, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says.

The CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report on battery injuries to kids found there were 14 battery-related deaths in the U.S. from 1995 to 2010 that happened to children ages four and under. Thirteen of those deaths happened between 2002 and 2010, and button batteries were implicated in 12 of the deaths.

Those deaths were part of a larger trend that found children's battery-related injuries have increased 2.5-fold from 1998 to 2010, going from 1,900 cases to 4,800. In 69 percent of cases the type of battery was reported, and more than half were linked to button batteries.

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Injuries were from batteries being swallowed, put up noses, and from ones that caused acid burns. Among all children, most were treated and released from the hospital, but 10 percent required a hospital stay. In almost 75 percent of cases the children were age four and younger.

Button batteries' small size—some are less than an inch—is at the crux of the problem. Parents may not witness their child swallowing the items, and symptoms, which include fever, diarrhea, vomiting and abdominal pain, can be tagged to countless other illnesses. Batteries that lodge in the esophagus can cause severe burns and bleeding.

"Because delays in diagnosis and treatment can lead to serious complications and death," the report's authors wrote, "children suspected of having ingested a battery should get prompt medical attention. It is also important to recognize that children might be reluctant or unable to say that they ingested a battery or gave one to a sibling."

The report said some safety standards are in place, but more could be done. In 2008 federal safety standards for toys included making batteries unreachable by putting them, for instance, in screwed-in compartments.

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The CDC suggested that added protection could come from batteries being enclosed in child-resistant packaging, and from securing button batteries in products à la kids' toys.

Last year the Consumer Product Safety Commission issued a similar warning about small magnets, often found in building sets. When those are swallowed in multiples or with other metal objects, they can magnetize through the intestinal wall, causing blockages, perforations or intestinal twisting.

The CPSC lists [precautions](#) parents can take to guard against battery swallowing, such as using tape to secure battery compartments children may have access to.



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