

National

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Battery nearly kills Queensland toddler

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The family of a young boy whose throat was eaten away by a battery he swallowed is urging parents to be aware of toys powered by the bright, shiny button-shaped batteries this Christmas.

One-year-old Hunter Cheshire from Deception Bay, north of Brisbane, swallowed the battery in April when his parents weren't looking.

It became stuck in his voice box and began to leak acid, burning a hole in his windpipe and causing serious damage to his organs.

He was suffering a cold at the time and his family only realised there was a real problem a week later when he began dry reaching and vomiting.

An Xray was done at the Royal Childrens Hospital in Brisbane, and Hunter was taken in for emergency surgery to remove the battery, but the damage was already done.

"His bodily fluids were leaking into his windpipe, which was getting into his lungs and filling them up," Hunter's father Jason Cheshire told reporters at hospital on Tuesday.

A second, dangerous surgery was done about three weeks later to sew Hunter's stomach and throat closed.

"We were told his chances weren't too good," Mr Cheshire said.

"He didn't have much chance of living at all.

"To see him nearly die in front of us really shocked us.

He is now fed through a tube to his stomach and has a hole in his neck to drain saliva.

He'll go in for a third surgery on Wednesday to repair his windpipe.

But the battle won't be over.

Doctor Katie Tinning said Hunter will have to undergo a surgery every 6 to 12 months to stretch his oesophagus.

"We hope he will have a normal life and will be able to eat through his mouth ... but he will always have ongoing complications for the rest of his life."

Hunter's mother Belinda said Hunter needs 24-hour care, but he's improving.

"Thankfully, he is a real little fighter and we know he is over the worst of it," she said.

"But what happened to us could happen to anyone.

"We really want something positive to come out of this by making all other parents aware of how easily it can happen."

On average, between two and three children are rushed to Queensland Health emergency departments every day after having accidentally swallowed foreign objects such as batteries, magnets, sinkers, safety pins and wire.

Since July last year, over 1200 children under 14 have presented to public hospitals in Queensland with ingestion-related injuries.

Some 260 of these occurred during the peak period of November, December and January.

Doctor Tinning said there is some evidence that there is an increasing rate of corrosive injuries for toddlers.

"One of the main culprits are these lithium batteries," she said.

"It can be fatal."

Dr Tinning urged parents to be on the alert for the batteries and small objects in Christmas stockings.

"Parents need to be sure that they can see their children when playing with these things," she said.

"It's not only when they're playing, it's also when they are stored, they need to be kept out of reach."

Initial symptoms that something has been swallowed are choking episodes, coughing, colour change, difficulty swallowing, vomiting, while some children may also lean forward to alleviate pressure on their throats.

The Cheshire family hopes battery companies will place warnings on all batteries about the possibility they could be fatal and the need for a person to be taken to a hospital immediately if ingested.

Batteries can cause serious damage to children within one hour and to adults within six hours of ingestion.