

Don't let your holiday be marred by injuries, death due to button batteries, fire, falls

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By Rita R. Robison

Are you aware that musical holiday card, flameless candle, and many other items contain small “button” batteries that can cause serious harm to young children?

“We are seeing more very young children swallowing small button batteries out of everything from musical holiday cards, wrist watches, and thermometers to small toys and remote controls,” Kathy Sie, M.D., surgeon and director of the Childhood Communication Center at Seattle Children’s Hospital, said in a statement.



“It’s much worse than when a child swallows a coin,” Sie said. “When a battery gets stuck in a child’s throat, saliva triggers an electrical current that causes a chemical reaction within a few minutes of contact. Serious internal injury can happen in about two hours.”

A video on button battery safety is available on Seattle Children’s YouTube site.

More than 3,400 swallowing cases involving all sizes of button batteries were reported in 2010 in the United States, according to Safe Kids USA. Nineteen serious injuries occurred, and some children died. All fatalities and 85 percent of major injuries were among children age four and younger.

“The problem is these batteries are found in so many everyday objects like electronic car door openers on key rings and bathroom scales,” said State Health Officer Maxine Hayes, M.D., a pediatrician. “Parents should keep these devices out of reach and lock away loose batteries. Because these products are not specifically for children, they don’t have the kind of safety controls that things like toys have.”

A child who has swallowed a button battery may wheeze, drool, cough, or gag. The child may refuse to eat, have decreased appetite, complain of chest discomfort, or have difficulty swallowing.

What to do if a child swallows a coin-sized battery

- Go to an emergency room immediately. Tell emergency staff it might be a battery.
- Give staff the identification number from the battery’s package, if possible, or bring the package with you.

- Don't let the child eat or drink, and don't induce vomiting.

More information about protecting children from coin-sized batteries can be found at Safe Kids USA.

A number of holiday injuries are reported to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission each year. The commission estimates the number has grown in the last few years.

Although deaths and injuries from Christmas tree and candle fires are down, reports of falls from ladders while hanging decorations and cuts and scrapes from broken glass ornaments are going up.

“Breakable ornaments shouldn't be hung low on a tree where young children and pets can knock them down,” Hayes said. “And even though we're seeing fewer fires, take care when using candles, woodstoves, and fireplaces.”

For safety tips, get some advice for kids from the Muppets at the Safety at Home website, sponsored by the Underwriters Laboratories.

For more information for baby boomer consumers, visit my blog [The Survive and Thrive Boomer Guide](#).