

Healthcare Traveler

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Studies: Pacifiers and batteries pose threats to small children

It's difficult at times to track everything that children put in their mouths. However two new studies show that threats abound when it comes to children and some household items.

New research shows that every four hours a child under the age of 3-years-old is treated in an emergency room for an injury caused by a baby bottle, a pacifier, or a sippy cup.

Most of the injuries were cuts and bruises caused by falls while walking or running with the item in the mouth.

Perhaps more alarming, another recent study shows that during a 20-year period from 1990 to 2009, there were about 66,000 battery-related emergency department visits by U.S. children under 18.

Both studies appear in a recent issue of *Pediatrics*.

Kids were sent to the emergency room after placing button batteries in their mouths, noses and ears, but most frequently the reason was because they swallowed batteries. Overall, the number of battery-related injuries doubled from 2,591 in 1990 to 5,525 by 2009, and the average age of kids sent to emergency department was 4-years-old.

Researchers say the number of these injuries in young children is on the rise, along with the increasing popularity of lithium button batteries in electronic devices, which are a small, coin-sized button battery found in many toys or remote controls.

Swallowing a button battery, such as those found in remote controls, electronic games, and watches, can be especially dangerous for young children. Researchers say these small batteries can become lodged in the esophagus and can lead to severe injury or even death in less than two hours.

In cases of children tripping and falling with drinking containers or pacifiers, the one study found that most injuries involved bottles (65.8 percent), followed by pacifiers (19.9 percent) and sippy cups (14.3 percent). More than 86 percent of the injuries were caused by falls while using the products.

"We found that approximately two-thirds of injuries occurred at age one year, when children have transitioned to unsteady walking and are prone to falls," writes researcher Sarah Keim, PhD, of the Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, and colleagues.

Researchers found that since electronics are smaller than ever before, these small batteries are used various items ranging from toys, games, hearing aids, watches, calculators, and remote controls. Not surprisingly, lithium, which makes the batteries more powerful, can also make them more dangerous to children who come into contact with them.


"Young children have a natural tendency to explore their environment by placing batteries and other objects into their mouths," the researchers write.

Smith said in order to reduce these injury rates, product manufacturers need to step up and make more products safe for children.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the National Capital Poison Center recommend the following steps to prevent unintentional battery ingestion:

- Never leave batteries sitting out. Store spare batteries, and batteries to be recycled, out of sight and reach of young children. If recycling is not possible, wrap used batteries securely and discard them where a child can't find them.
- Discard button batteries carefully.
- Do not allow children to play with button batteries, and keep button batteries out of your child's reach.
- Caution hearing aid users to keep hearing aids and batteries out of the reach of children.



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