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Button batteries in gadgets can be hazardous to kids

NALINI RAVICHANDRAN | New Delhi, June 27, 2012 | 13:50



The dangers of ingesting such a battery go well beyond choking and can even cause death.

They are present in watches, gadgets and toys. But what you may not know is that the seemingly innocuous button batteries can be hazardous to children.

City doctors say the number of kids they treat with battery-related injuries is on the rise. "Every week, there are at least five emergency cases of kids swallowing small batteries, especially kids in the age group of 1 to 5," Dr Vaibhav Sharma,

city-based internal medicine specialist, said.

The minuscule size of these cells as well as their easy accessibility can be blamed. "Button cells are found in items around the house and kids tend to push these into their nose, ears and mouth," said Dr J.M. Hans, chairman, ENT and cochlear implants, BLK superspeciality hospital.

The dangers of ingesting such a battery go well beyond choking and can even cause death. "The batteries can get lodged in the oesophagus, burn holes in it, and lead to chronic breathing problems and infections," Dr N. K. Pandey, MD at the Asian Institute of Medical Sciences, said.

If the cell casing gets eroded, it can leak acid. The newer batteries can cause greater damage as they are more powerful. Delay in seeking treatment can aggravate the situation. Each minute is precious as the battery can start breaking down as early as two hours after ingestion.

Chances are that if the battery has made its way into the stomach, it will pass on its own without difficulty. If not, the child would need observation and a procedure to remove the battery immediately.

Also, a child who has ingested a button cell may not show symptoms - from a cold to sneezes to other varied ones - initially. "If the parent suspects the child has swallowed anything unusual, they should take the kid for an Xray right away," Dr Pandey added.

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