

Tiny Batteries Pose Growing Threat to Kids

So-called button batteries can cause choking and death, report warns

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THURSDAY, Aug. 30 (HealthDay News) -- As the use of small button batteries has become more widespread to power devices such as toys, watches and hearing aids, more young children have swallowed them, resulting in choking and even deaths, a new U.S. report says.

From 1997 to 2010, as many as 40,000 children under 13 years old have been treated in emergency rooms for ingesting the tiny batteries, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

"This is a problem we have known about because of all the electronic devices people have," said Dr. Amanda Porro, a pediatrician at Miami Children's Hospital, who was not

involved with the report.

"Parents have to keep these devices away from small children," she said, adding that one of the most dangerous consequences of swallowing a button battery is having it become lodged in the child's esophagus.

"The child may just have vague symptoms," Porro said. "Unless you have seen the child swallow the battery it's very hard to diagnose and you have to have an x-ray to see the battery," she said.

Porro suggests keeping the batteries locked away from children. "If a parent sees a child swallow a battery, they need to go to the emergency room straight away because within two hours there can be significant damage -- it's a real emergency," she said.

The report was published in the Aug. 31 issue of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

Over the years the number of children treated for ingesting the batteries has increased 2.5-fold, from 1,900 in 1998 to 4,800 in 2010. In most cases children were treated and released, but 10 percent were hospitalized, according to the report.

Thirteen children died from ingesting batteries from 2002 to 2010, compared to one in 1998. These deaths were generally caused by the toxic contents of the batteries leaking into the child's esophagus where the battery had become lodged, the report found.

When these batteries get stuck in a child's esophagus, serious burns can occur in under two hours and fatal bleeding can happen after two weeks, the report said.

These cases can often be hard to diagnose, and in several cases children died because the lodged battery was missed, according to the report.

"Parents and caregivers should be aware of the potential hazards associated with battery exposure (particularly ingestion of button batteries) and ensure that products containing them are either kept away from children or that the batteries are secured safely in the product," the researchers wrote.

"Because delays in diagnosis and treatment can lead to serious complications and death, 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 researchers added.

SOURCES: Amanda Porro, M.D., pediatrician, Miami Children's Hospital, Miami, Fla.; Aug. 31, 2012, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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