



Our view: Boy's battery ordeal stirs concern

By the Editorial Board

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For 5-year-old Cody Stonestreet, the poison came from a toy — a fidget spinner he received as a party favor.

Cody pried loose a nickle-sized battery, swallowed it and launched a painful, harrowing medical odyssey.

The battery lodged in his throat and almost immediately began searing his esophagus. As his mother Tara Stonestreet told Erie Times-News reporter David Bruce, Cody thrashed about and vomited blood. He was flown to Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC, where he underwent multiple surgeries and contracted pneumonia that partially collapsed a lung. Not yet recovered, he hopes to be home by Thanksgiving.

The Millcreek Township family's ordeal shocks and terrifies. Lithium battery injuries occur when a person's saliva reacts with the battery. One doctor said it is akin to someone drinking lye or drain opener.

Tara Stonestreet, like many others, was unaware of the danger posed by the near-ubiquitous lithium "button" batteries. But it turns out that this problem dates back decades and since 2003, has been on the rise.

More than 3,500 people swallow batteries each year, according to U.S. poison control centers. The American Academy of Pediatrics says the number of children who suffered serious injury or death caused by battery ingestion more than quadrupled in the years between 2006 and 2010, compared with the rate five years prior.

The New York Times in 2010 detailed the story of a 13-month-old Ohio boy who died after he swallowed a battery. The BBC in 2016 shared the story of a 18-month-old girl whose windpipe was burned through.

Regulations govern batteries in children's toys. But more must be done to raise awareness and protect children like Cody and others, such as the elderly, who might be at risk from the dangers posed in the wide array of other common household items that contain button batteries.

As the National Capital Poison Center said, “batteries are everywhere” — in remote control devices, bathroom scales, cameras, hearing aids, flashing shoes, watches, key chains and keyless entry fobs, video games, singing greeting cards and more.

The Center recommends batteries be stored out of children’s sight and says parents also should check battery compartments to ensure they are secure.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has been working to encourage industry to voluntarily adopt button battery safety standards. Experts who recently testified to the Commission said those standards should require that button batteries are securely enclosed. They also called for batteries to be redesigned so that they do not pose this serious health danger when ingested. Those reforms must be pursued with urgency.

If battery purveyors fail to act, then lawmakers should step in and regulate this hazard.



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