

Mom's heartbreak after baby swallows battery, dies: 'It didn't have to happen'

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Trista Hamsmith lost her toddler daughter, Reese, in December after she swallowed a battery -- and now she's calling for action to prevent other children from the same fate.

Pray for Reese Hamsmith/Facebook

Texas mother Trista Hamsmith lost her 17-month-old daughter, Reese, in December due to complications from swallowing a battery — and she's doing her part to ensure the toddler did not die in vain.

"Kids are dying," Hamsmith, 39, told the "Today" show. "We've got to do everything we can to get this information to parents and put pressure on the industry to make changes to protect the kids."

Hamsmith, who lives in Lubbock, noticed that Reese, who was typically a lively character, began wheezing. She was also congested and lethargic, and a pediatrician said croup — an upper-airway infection that generally affects children — was the cause.

Not long after, Hamsmith noticed a button battery had gone missing from a remote control; later, at a local emergency room, doctors confirmed that Reese had swallowed it, and it burned a hole in her esophagus.

“This story needs to be told,” Hamsmith added. “It didn’t have to happen.”



Reese was in and out of the hospital with two surgeries and ventilation under sedation before dying in December.

Pray for Reese Hamsmith/Facebook

Dr. Emily Durkin, the medical director of children's surgery at Helen DeVos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan — who did not treat Reese — told "Today" that swallowed batteries can cause serious harm if they lodge in the esophagus, which has

two narrow ends.

“If you get a narrow, flat, pancake-like button battery that gets stuck at one of these natural narrowings, then the front wall of the esophagus collapses against the button battery and the back wall,” she said. “[This] completes that circuit, and the electric current actually flows through the esophageal tissues. And when that happens, it starts to kill the tissues at the burn.”



Reese was known for her bubbly personality.
Pray for Reese Hamsmith/Facebook

Reese had surgery in October, then returned home. But several days later, she returned to the emergency room after more complications arose.

“We found out that a fistula had been created, which is like a passageway,” Hamsmith said. “There was a hole burned through her trachea and through her esophagus. When that tunnel formed, it was allowing air to go where it didn’t need to be. Food and drinks also went where they didn’t need to go.”



Reese died on Dec. 17, 2020.
Pray for Reese Hamsmith/Facebook

From that point forward, Reese had a feeding tube and was sedated on a ventilator. She even needed another surgery, then had to receive CPR twice after falling into distress. That second time led to Reese's death on Dec. 17, 2020.

Now, Hamsmith is calling for action, demanding manufacturers make safer batteries and Congress address it. She also hopes that manufacturers can make safer device covers, like having batter-storage compartments secured by screws, to add a layer of safety for children.

“We just need safer batteries,” she said.

Filed under batteries , death , parenting , safety , 3/2/21