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Swallowing button batteries a growing hazard for kids



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by Natalie James - May 25, 2010 - 0 comments



The accidental swallowing of batteries, particularly the "button batteries" used to power calculators, hearing aids and a host of handheld digital devices, is sharply rising in the number of children, suggest the new alarming statistics from two new studies.



The researchers found that most of the batteries swallowed by kids came not only from just toys but also from inside electronic products.

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The statistics show that the rate of severe poisonings from battery ingestion among U.S. children has soared in the past 25 years, reports Reuters.

Button batteries becoming a growing hazard

The Reuters report says that the slim round button batteries are becoming a growing hazard, along with the growing use of lithium "button" cells in a wide range of consumer products.

In their studies, the researchers found an alarming increase in the number of children accidentally swallowing those little coin-sized lithium "button batteries" which in these days are found in several household items, such as remote controls, singing greeting cards and thermometers.

After the analysis of the reports of swallowed batteries, they found that 20 millimeter lithium button cells (about the size of a nickel) posed the greatest hazard, with children younger than 4 were the most frequent victims.

According to the two new studies, the that American children will experience a serious health complication as ingesting a button-battery has gone up 7 times from 1985 to 2009.

Swallowing button cells more dangerous

Accounting for a growing number of serious injuries and deaths, the accidental swallowing of button batteries is worse than swallowing a coin, the experts say.

"We're talking about a really profoundly devastating injury, and sometimes fatalities," said lead author for both studies Dr. Toby Litovitz, director of the National Capital Poison Center and department of emergency medicine at Georgetown University School of Medicine in Washington D.C. "But I think people are not aware of the problem, which is very, very much worse than swallowing a coin. And of course it's hard for parents to protect their kids when they don't realize that something is a problem."

"It's also clearly a worsening situation," she continued. "From the late 1970's until now there have been 14 fatalities in the U.S. that we're aware of, and of those 10 were just in the last six years. So that should send a signal of warning."

Dr. Litovitz and co-researchers drew their conclusion after analyzing data from three sources, the National Poison Data System (which had 56,535 cases); the National Battery Ingestion Hotline (8,648 cases); and the medial literature, according to WebMD.com.

Study findings

After the analysis of the reports of swallowed batteries, they found that 20 millimeter lithium button cells (about the size of a nickel) posed the greatest hazard, with children younger than 4 were the most frequent victims.

The research team found that ingestions of 20- to 25- millimeter diameter batteries increased from 1 percent in 1990 to 18 percent in 2008, which paralleled a boom in lithium battery cell ingestion from 1.3 percent to 24 percent.

A database of 8,648 cases received by a national battery hotline since 1990 showed that 94 percent of ingestion incidents involved button batteries, involving children who were younger than 6 years old.

The results show that in the past decade, roughly, 92.1 percent of the fatal and major cases involved 20-mm lithium cell batteries.

Second study results

Litovitz and colleagues carried out another study to look at how children and adults obtained the batteries.

They found most of the batteries swallowed by kids came not only from just toys, but also from inside electronic products.

Remote controls were the most common single source, with more than 37 percent of the 20-millimeter lithium batteries that were ingested were taken from remote controls.

In other cases, ingested batteries were removed directly from the household products nearly 62 percent of the time, while batteries were loose nearly 29 percent of the time.

The study found 8.2 percent of the batteries that were swallowed were taken out directly of a battery packaging by a child.

A word of advise

The team also suggested what kinds of prevention strategies could be implemented to avoid the incidences of accidental swallowing of the batteries.

Besides suggesting parents to be careful by keeping these batteries out of children's reach, the researchers also recommend that manufacturers design their products to require a tool to open battery compartments.

The researchers also advise parents to place strong tape over the battery compartment of all household products so they do not pop open, if the products are dropped.

If accidentally swallowed, the batteries need to be removed within two hours to prevent severe injuries.

The results of the study were published [online](#) by the medical journal 'Pediatrics.'

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