

"Button" Batteries: Safety Risk for Kids

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Parents have something new to be concerned about: "button" batteries. These batteries, about the size of a quarter, experts say, are injuring children at an alarming rate.

As **"Early Show" Consumer Correspondent Susan Koeppen** notes, they're found in many products in people's homes, but they pose a serious risk for children.

Koeppen shared the story of 13-month-old Kaiden Vasquez who became seriously ill when he swallowed a button battery. But when his mother Amy Vasquez rushed him to the emergency room, she was told her son had the stomach flu.

But after a week, Kaiden got even worse.

Amy said, "They finally got an X-ray and discovered that he had swallowed what they thought was a coin."

However, what doctors thought was a coin turned out to be a lithium button battery from a remote control in the family's home.

Koeppen added the battery wasn't just stuck in Kaiden's throat, it had burned a hole through his esophagus.

Amy said, "I never imagined he could have swallowed a button battery. Never imagined the extent of the damage that it did to him."

Kaiden was in the hospital for weeks and needed a feeding tube for months.

"It was devastating because I knew that we could lose him at any minute," Amy said.

According to the National Capital Poison Center, 3,500 button battery ingestions are reported to U.S. poison centers every year. Nine deaths have been reported in the past six years. And in 2009 alone, toddlers in Ohio and Colorado lost their lives after swallowing button batteries.

Dr. Toby Litovitz, director of the National Capital Poison Center in Washington D.C., told **CBS News**, "We're seeing more serious cases and more frequent serious cases."

Litovitz says any button battery can cause a problem, but the 20 millimeter battery -- about the size of a penny or nickel -- poses the greatest threat.

Litovitz explained, "The battery gets stuck in the throat, and a hole is created because the battery essentially burns through the esophagus or the throat."

She added, "These are tragic, tragic cases. They are disasters that are very difficult to treat."

Button batteries of all sizes are found in common household products, such as thermometers, calculators, scales, and remote controls.

Litovitz demonstrated how a child could get a battery out of a remote control for a music player. "It's rather easy to get the battery out of this," she said. "You just pull it out and there's the battery. So any child could get a battery out of this remote device."

Koeppen added even musical greeting cards use button batteries.

Litovitz says 62 percent of children who swallow batteries get them directly out of the product. And even dead batteries can be dangerous, Litovitz said.

She said, "Dead batteries don't power the products but they can still cause serious damage to the child."

A year and a half later, Kaiden Vasquez has fully recovered from his injury, but his mom says manufacturers need to do a better job of securing battery compartments.

"I feel totally grateful that he had made it through this, but I do not want anybody else to suffer what we had suffered," Amy said. "It's devastating to a family."

Koeppen added on "**The Early Show**" that unless you see a child swallow the battery, it can be difficult to diagnose. Symptoms mimic the flu with vomiting, fever, cough and lack of appetite.

"This is something that needs to be treated quickly," she said. "Doctors say you only have about two hours to get that battery out before it starts to burn."

Koeppen said some products actually require that you use a screwdriver to get into the battery compartment. She said the battery industry is calling on product manufacturers to make battery compartments in such a way that you need a tool to get inside. Koeppen said the makers of children's products do a good job of that. In the meantime, Koeppen said, parents need to keep products with batteries out of the reach of children.