

Many Children Injured After Swallowing Button Batteries

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Coin-sized button batteries power dozens of items in and around our homes, from remote controls to cameras to singing greeting cards. They also accounted for 84% of the battery-related hospital emergency department visits by children from 1990 to 2009, and once ingested, they can be life-threatening, a new study says.

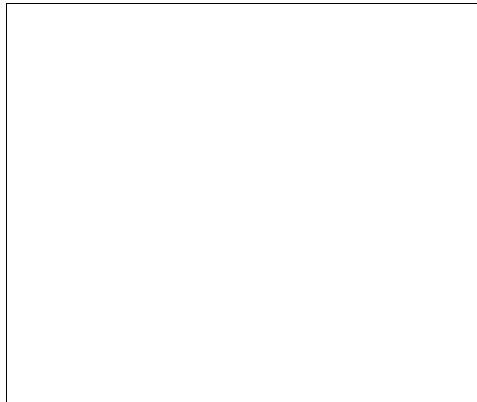
There were nearly 66,000 battery-related emergency department visits by children under 18 during the 20-year-span, and the annual number more than doubled - from 2,591 to 5,525 - by 2009, says the study, reported today in the journal *Pediatrics*. More than 75% of all battery-related hospital visits involved children 5 or younger.

The increase in emergency department visits coincides with the introduction of the 3-volt 20-millimeter lithium battery into the marketplace, says researcher Gary Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. This newer battery "is more powerful and can cause tissue damage much more quickly," Smith says.

In most cases when a button battery is ingested, it is eliminated in the stool, he says. If it lands with its negative pole in contact with tissue fluids in the lining of the esophagus, however, a microcurrent can generate hydroxide, resulting in alkaline burns and perforations of the esophagus in less than two hours, he says. Complications including fatal aorta damage have been documented. "Often there are no symptoms early on, so it's important that an X-ray be taken as soon as possible if ingestion is suspected," Smith says.

"Individual manufacturers have stepped up to make their devices that contain button

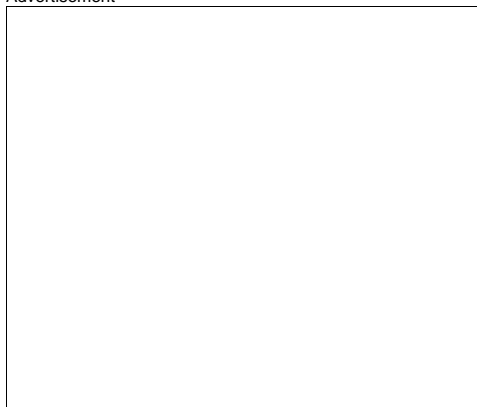
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batteries more resistant to child access," Smith adds. "Parents need to make sure their children cannot get access, by taping battery compartments shut and keeping loose batteries out of children's reach."

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