

## Parents get new warning as kids continue to swallow small batteries at alarming rate

Number of emergencies has doubled in last 20 years

BY [HEIDI EVANS](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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Small children are swallowing small batteries, like those in this plastic bag, at an alarming rate.

The number of kids rushed to the hospital after swallowing coin-sized batteries found in TV remotes and other gadgets has doubled, a new study says.

The researchers found that over a 20-year period, there were nearly 66,000 emergency room visits for batteries, with a dramatic increase over the final eight years.

Button batteries accounted for 2,785 ER visits by children nationwide in 2009, up from 1,301 in 1990.

"The increase we're seeing is a call to action," said Dr. Gary Smith, lead author of the study published online Monday in the journal *Pediatrics*.

"I've treated many of these children, and when it happens, it's absolutely horrifying," said Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

"So while we've always respected the dangers these batteries pose, now it's really time for us to redouble our efforts to warn parents and work with manufacturers to take steps against this risk with safer packaging."

Several New York City ER doctors say they are all too familiar with these cases and urge parents to get their child to the ER if they suspect they swallowed a battery.

It's especially dangerous for young children since the batteries can get stuck in the throat and block an airway. The chemicals inside can leak and burn a hole in the esophagus, or worse.

Dr. Joan Bregstein, a pediatric ER doctor at New York-Presbyterian Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital, said she had a three-year-old battery patient just last month.

Luckily for her, the battery had moved to the little girl's stomach and she eventually passed it.

"What makes these batteries so enticing to little kids is that they are small and cute and they look like candy," said Bregstein.

"This little girl had no symptoms - she was playful, had no vomiting or shortness of breath. Luckily the parent or babysitter saw her swallow it and we found it on the X-ray right away — since damage can occur as soon as two hours after swallowing."

Dr. Estevan Garcia, director of pediatric emergency medicine at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn added: "Parents need to understand the risk of these batteries. It's a medical emergency if swallowed and if we see it in the esophagus, it needs to be removed ASAP."

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