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Bottles, Binkies, and Batteries Send Kids to ER

Injuries Caused by Batteries, Baby Bottles, Sippy Cups, and Pacifiers on the Rise

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WebMD Health News

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May 14, 2012 -- The same bottle or toy that comforts small children may prove dangerous as they get older and more curious.

New research shows that every four hours a child under 3 is treated in an emergency room for an injury caused by a baby bottle, pacifier, or sippy cup. Most of the injuries were cuts and bruises caused by falls while walking or running with the item in the mouth.

Another new study shows that more than 66,000 children have been treated in the ER since 1990 for battery-related injuries, like swallowing a small, coin-sized button battery from a toy or remote control.

Researchers say the number of these injuries in young children is on the rise, along with the increasing popularity of lithium button batteries in electronic devices.

Swallowing a button battery, such as those found in remote controls, electronic games, and watches, can be especially dangerous for young children. Researchers say these small batteries can become lodged in the esophagus and can lead to severe injury or even death in less than two hours.

Both studies will appear in the June issue of *Pediatrics*.

Comfort Items Can Be Dangerous

The first study looked at injuries caused by bottles, pacifiers, and sippy cups requiring treatment in an emergency room in children under age 3.

Using information from the National Electric Injury Surveillance System, researchers found an estimated 45,000 children were treated in ERs for these injuries from 1991 to 2010.

Most injuries involved bottles (65.8%), followed by pacifiers (19.9%) and sippy cups (14.3%). More than 86% of the injuries were caused by falls while using the products.

"We found that approximately two-thirds of injuries occurred at age 1 year, when children have transitioned to unsteady walking and are prone to falls," write researcher Sarah Keim, PhD, of the Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, and colleagues.

Although the injuries were serious enough to merit a trip to the ER, researchers say that very few were fatal. Cuts and bruises accounted for about 83% of injuries.

Researchers say it's the first study to look specifically at injuries in young children caused by bottles, pacifiers, and sippy cups.

Overall, the number of injuries caused by these products was small compared with the injuries caused by other baby products like cribs, bassinets, and playpens. But researchers say they represent an important and growing source of injuries over the last 20 years.

Given the risks associated with baby bottles, pacifiers, and sippy cups among young children, researchers recommend children not use these products beyond the intended ages. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children transition from a sippy cup to a regular cup around age 1.

Button Batteries Pose Risks



In the second study, researchers analyzed battery-related injuries among children under 18 treated in ERs from 1990 to 2009 using the same national injury database.

The results showed a total of 65,788 children were treated for injuries caused by batteries over the 20-year period. The number of battery-related injuries rose significantly during the last eight years of the study.

Most injuries (about 77%) were the result of swallowing the battery, especially among children aged 5 years or younger. Other injuries included inserting the battery in the nose or ear.

Button batteries were implicated in nearly 84% of emergency room visits where the battery type was known.

Researchers say the increasing rate of battery-related injuries among children deserves increased prevention efforts by parents and caregivers.

"Young children have a natural tendency to explore their environment by placing batteries and other objects into their mouths,"

write researcher Samantha Sharpe, of the Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital, and colleagues. "Child caregivers should ensure that batteries are stored out of the reach of children and discarded properly."

Researchers also recommend that battery compartments of all electronic devices are taped shut.

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SOURCES:

Keim, S. *Pediatrics*, June 2012.

News release, American Academy of Pediatrics.

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