

Batteries sending more children to ER

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Batteries, the size of buttons, are sending more and more kids to the emergency room.

Cases of children taken to the emergency room after accidentally swallowing batteries have doubled over the past twenty years.



Parents should listen to the general advice regarding choking, especially for those 5 years and younger.

LOS ANGELES, CA (Catholic Online) - "The increase we're seeing is a call to action," said study lead author Dr. Gary A. Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. "I've treated many of these children, and when it happens it's absolutely horrifying. 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."

The data covered the years between 1990 and 2009, and showed that roughly 84 percent of emergency visits involved button-sized batteries. Four different types of accidental contact were noted: swallowing and insertion of a battery in the ear, nose, or mouth. Over the past 20

years, there were nearly 66,000 ER visits. Button batteries accounted for 2,785 ER visits by children younger than the age of 18 in 2009.

"In effect, the curve of ER cases is now swinging way up," Smith said, "which means the increase is increasing, so to speak. And this coincides with another very important factor, which is that when they are swallowed the risk is greater than ever because of the relatively recent introduction of 3-volt 20 mm lithium batteries. Button batteries used to be just 1.5 volts, so that means that these new batteries are much more powerful than their predecessors."

Although 92 percent of battery cases are successfully treated, the remainder face an increasing risk for severe internal damage, Smith said. "When these increasingly powerful batteries stop in one spot in the esophagus they can create a little micro-current and burn a hole right through, causing very serious damage in less than two hours," he explained. "It can even burn into the aorta and cause a child to bleed to death."

Toddlers and others below the age of 5 had the highest risk for accidental button-battery contact, with the average age being just below 4 years old. Boys were accounted for nearly 60 percent of the ER visits, while most cases, nearly 77 percent, were the result of swallowing the batteries. 10 percent of cases were for nose contact, followed by mouth exposure being 7.5 percent and ear insertion being roughly 6 percent.

"For parents, the message is that if they suspect that their child has swallowed a battery they need to get to the ER right away," Smith said. "And in terms of prevention, they need to store and dispose of batteries out of reach, and also tape all battery compartments shut. For manufacturers, what we really need is to have an overarching effort by the industry to make battery compartments inaccessible and child-resistant. For all products. Not just toys. Because most were not coming from products intended for children. They were coming from remote controls. Flashlights."

Dr. Lee Sanders, an associate professor at Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif., also expressed concern.

"Whenever we see a marked rise in any cause of injury for a child, it's concerning from a public-health standpoint," he said. "So we need to investigate the root cause of this doubling. One possibility is that there is, in fact, increased exposure to button batteries themselves. But of course we might have to also look at other causes, like changes in the actual reporting of cases that might have taken place as the system for reporting improves or the coding for reporting improves."

Sanders noted that parents should listen to the general advice regarding choking, especially for those 5 years and younger. "Children should never be unattended and they should never be within reach of any object that can fit through a choke tube, which is basically the cardboard tube of a toilet-paper roll," he said. This is particularly the case with objects not normally considered dangerous, such as children's toys that have batteries and other small parts, and various objects found in the kitchen or bathroom. "That's the best preventive strategy," he said.

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Pope Benedict XVI's Prayer Intentions for May 2012

General Intention: The Family.

That initiatives which defend and uphold the role of the family may be promoted within society.

Missionary Intention: Mary, Guide of Missionaries.

That Mary, Queen of the World and Star of Evangelization, may accompany all missionaries in proclaiming her Son Jesus.

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