

# Small button batteries pose big risk for kids

CHILDREN'S HEALTH | AUGUST 31, 2012 | BY: SHARON GLOGER FRIEDMAN

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According to a recent [report](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6134a1.htm?s_cid=mm6134a1_w) ([http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6134a1.htm?s\\_cid=mm6134a1\\_w](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6134a1.htm?s_cid=mm6134a1_w)) t by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](http://www.cdc.gov) (<http://www.examiner.com/topic/cdc>)), those tiny round batteries that provide the juice for everything from electronic toys to talking greeting cards could be life-threatening to children.

The CDC and the [Consumer Product Safety Commission \(CPSC\)](http://www.cpsc.gov/) (<http://www.cpsc.gov/>) report that between 1997 and 2010, more than 40,000 children have been injured by small batteries. Of the 14 children under the age of 13 who died, 12 of the deaths were attributed to round, button-sized batteries.

Scott Wolfson, director of communications for the CPSC, called these batteries a “serious hazard.”

“There is growing attention to this hazard and in increase in the number of fatalities,” Wolfson told [ABC News](http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/health/2012/08/30/tiny-batteries-causing-big-health-problems-for-kids/) (<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/health/2012/08/30/tiny-batteries-causing-big-health-problems-for-kids/>). “Today, more of these small batteries are being used in products such as remote controls, greeting cards, and flashlights, and CPSC is seeing children getting access to those batteries.”

## Complications and symptoms

As [reported by WebMD](http://children.webmd.com/news/20120830/tiny-batteries-rising-risk-children) (<http://children.webmd.com/news/20120830/tiny-batteries-rising-risk-children>), ingested batteries may pass through the intestine and safely exit the body. However, they often get lodged in the

[esophagus \(http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/picture-of-the-esophagus\)](http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/picture-of-the-esophagus) and a build-up of the chemical [hydroxide \(http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/279097/hydroxide\)](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/279097/hydroxide) can cause dangerous burns within hours. Stuck in the throat, a battery can also leak alkaline electrolyte, a corrosive chemical. Even if the battery does not leak, it can put pressure on the area where it is located, leading to tissue death.

Symptoms of battery ingestion include vomiting, abdominal pain, fever and diarrhea. The child may also experience difficulty breathing and swallowing. Because such symptoms can be attributed to a number of causes, it is difficult to diagnose battery ingestion if the child cannot communicate what happened, and by the time the cause of the symptoms is discovered, damage may have already occurred in the esophagus or stomach.

"That's what is so scary about these [symptoms], you can get damage so quickly," said [Alison Tothy, MD \(http://www.uchicagokidshospital.org/physicians/physician.html?id=6035\)](http://www.uchicagokidshospital.org/physicians/physician.html?id=6035), director of pediatric medicine at the University of Chicago, in an ABC News interview.

"But how many parents bring their kids to the emergency department for a little belly pain, but 8, 12, 14 hours later they are still having belly pain and starting to vomit...and there is even more damage that has been done because the battery has sat there for 24 hours," added Tothy.

Tothy urged parents to get children to the ER right away if they think their child has swallowed something.

"It's usually within four hours that a battery can cause damage," she said.

### **Preventive measures**

What can parents do to ensure their children are safe? The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends the following precautions:

- Dispose of all batteries carefully and out of the reach of your child.
- Do not allow your child to play with button batteries.
- Ask people who use hearing aids to keep the devices and their batteries in a place that is inaccessible to your child.
- Keep remotes and other electronics out of your child's reach. If an electronic device's battery compartment does not have a screw to secure it, use tape to keep it from opening easily.

If you think your child has swallowed a battery, call the National Button Battery Ingestion Hotline at 202-625-3333 or the National Universal Poison Control Hotline at 800-222-1222.

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Sharon Gloger Friedman is a former English teacher turned-freelancer, turned-copywriter/marketing director. She recently retired and left the 9-to-5 world behind to write fulltime. A Boston-based writer, Sharon has a keen interest in health issues and wants to help readers understand their health...