



Healthy Kids: Keeping children safe from button batteries



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Children, especially babies, see the world differently from adults. While an adult will see a small battery as a way to operate a greeting card or hearing aid, young children see something shiny they want to put in their mouth.

The Missouri Poison Center has had more than 60 reports of children ingesting button batteries this year. These batteries are typically found in hearing aids, watches, games, light-up jewelry, singing greeting cards and remote controls.

Button batteries typically pass through the body and show up when children go to the bathroom. However, sometimes batteries get caught in the body. This becomes a problem particularly for the new type of button batteries, which are more powerful than the

ones that came before, said Julie Weber, director of the Missouri Poison Center.

"A battery stuck in the esophagus can cause tissue damage," Weber said. "An electrical current can form outside the battery and this can actually cause a tissue burn. As you can imagine, a burn inside the throat is very painful and can be quite serious."

Although swallowing button batteries is dangerous, children and even elderly people have been involved in injuries when they placed the batteries in their nose or ears. This type of exposure to the batteries can also cause burns and serious injury.

Prevention is the safest approach to keeping children safe from button batteries. Singing greeting cards, which are often the culprit for button battery exposure, have become increasingly popular. When young children receive a musical greeting card, parents should consider keeping the card in a place where the child cannot access it.

If parents suspect a child has swallowed a button battery, they should contact the Poison Center hotline at 1-800-222-1222. This hotline will route the caller to their closest poison center to get immediate help. Parents should not attempt to induce vomiting.

As with any potential poisoning, it is helpful to provide as much information as possible about the type of battery. This information should be readily available on the packaging.

Many lament that parents today can be too protective and that it is impossible to keep children safe from all danger. Certainly this is true, but parents should try to see the world around them as their young child might see it and keep the environment as safe as possible.

"We learn what is safe to eat or touch from our parents and from others around us," Weber said. "Babies in particular are still learning what is safe for them to eat and what is not safe. Parents should be diligent to ensure that their children aren't able to access something that might be harmful to them. In many cases, it takes just a few seconds for a child to put something in his or her mouth that can cause permanent harm."

Dr. Bob Wilmott is chief of pediatrics at Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center and a professor of pediatric medicine at St. Louis University School of Medicine. If you have a question about your child's health, go to the "Ask Dr. Bob" section of the Cardinal Glennon web site at cardinalglennon.com.