

CHILD SAFETY BLOG

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Watch Out for Button Batteries and Kids

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Tiny lithium batteries the size and shape of buttons can kill or cause severe injury in a child who swallows one, doctors are reporting.

The batteries, which are found in remote controls, watches, and other home electronics and toys, cause a chemical reaction when swallowed that can burn through the delicate tissues in the neck. Kids sometimes swallow them when they take apart a toy, find the battery, and think it's candy.

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While rare, a death was reported in one child where the battery burned through the esophagus and attacked the aorta. Another child was left with a lifelong whisper from vocal cord damage. Another had to have feeding tubes and multiple surgeries for the damage to the gastric tract.

The journal Pediatrics reports the dangers of ingestion of lithium batteries by infants, which can and has caused deaths, [writes Tara Parker-Pope](#) of the New York Times.

The lead author of the medical journal article on this subject, Dr. Litovitz, says there is a “tight timeline” in which to rescue children from the injuries caused by lithium ingestion: while the batteries start causing severe damages as quickly as within 2 hours of ingestion, the problem is difficult to be diagnosed because small children cannot verbally communicate, and their symptoms (which can be loss of appetite, vomiting, coughing up blood) are nonspecific.

Pediatricians and parents are working to raise awareness of the dangers of small lithium batteries and to urge manufacturers of electronics to secure the battery in all electronic devices, not just toys. A woman whose 18-month-old daughter died after ingesting a lithium battery said that “there should be warnings on every item the batteries are in. They are in greeting cards and children’s books that talk. They’re everywhere.”

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