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CHILD SAFETY NOT SOMETHING TO BE TOYED WITH
Warning on dangers of button batteries, despite improving standards

The AMA has reminded parents to be vigilant these school holidays while children are playing with toys that are powered by button batteries.

Many children’s games, toys and other devices contain the shiny, coin-sized batteries, which pose a serious risk if swallowed or inserted in the nose or ear.

AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, said the battery’s shiny exterior was an unfortunate attractant.

“Young children, particularly those aged under five years, can find the batteries just as appealing as the toys themselves,” Dr Khorshid said.

“Many other objects that young children may inadvertently swallow pass through the gastrointestinal tract without causing too many problems.

“However, button batteries have a tendency to lodge in the oesophagus, where they cause a chemical reaction that results in severe caustic burns. The damage can start within a couple of hours and, in severe cases, can be fatal.

“Very young children may not have the capacity to tell an adult that they have swallowed a battery, or they may be reluctant to tell for fear of getting in trouble. Sometimes they may simply forget.

“The initial symptoms of complications are non-specific – a loss of appetite, fever, or drooling. If a parent or carer suspects that a child may have swallowed a button battery, they should seek medical attention immediately.

“The child will need an X-ray to identify and locate the battery, and may need surgery to remove it.”

With at least 44 individual cases since December 2017 where young children have suffered severe injuries following the ingestion or insertion of button batteries, the Federal Government recently introduced mandatory safety and information standards for their use in products.

A transition period of 18 months is in place so industry can implement any manufacturing and design changes to products and packaging and undertake any testing needed to ensure compliance with the new standards.

The new standards require products containing button batteries to have secure, child-resistant battery compartments, and for clear warnings on packaging and instructions. Button and coin battery packaging and batteries larger than 2cm wide must also be clearly marked with warnings and “keep out of reach of children” symbols on the battery cell.

Dr Khorshid said vigilance by those responsible for young children was needed despite the Federal Government intervention.

"While the AMA welcomes the December 2020 announcement of a shift to mandatory safety and information standards for button batteries, there are still safety issues for consumers to be aware of while industry shifts to new compliance requirements," he said.

“The best gift we can give to young people in our care is to keep them safe while they use those presents designed to give them enjoyment and stimulation, particularly at this special time of year.”

Further information about the new standards can be found on the Product Safety Australia website at: <https://www.productsafety.gov.au/product-safety-laws/safety-standards-bans/mandatory-standards>

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