



BUTTON BATTERIES A SERIOUS RISK TO CHILDREN - AMA

Parents have been urged to be on the lookout for stray button batteries in games and toys, musical greeting cards, and other devices this Christmas.

AMA Vice President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that the shiny, coin-sized batteries posed a serious risk to young children if swallowed or inserted in the nose or ear.

“Button batteries are found in a wide variety of household items, including in toys and games that are likely to be given as gifts at this time of year,” Dr Bartone said.

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

“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.”

It is estimated that 20 children each week present to an emergency department with a button battery-related injury.

“Adults should take care not to leave new or discarded batteries unattended and within reach of small children, and if you are giving a gift that requires button batteries, it’s a good idea to let the recipient know how important it is to keep the batteries away from children,” Dr Bartone said.

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CONTACT: John Flannery 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761
 Maria Hawthorne 02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753

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