

Medical staff awareness needed to reduce growing button battery injury risk

***The Battery Controlled* partnership was launched in New Zealand today to help raise awareness among parents and medical first responders, such as paramedics, practice nurses, GPs, A&M and hospital emergency department staff, on a little known issue that has serious and even fatal consequences to small children—the ingestion or insertion of powerful button batteries or coin-sized lithium batteries.**

When a child swallows or inserts a button battery in the nose or ears, it can get stuck in the throat, nose or ear canal. Saliva or secretions trigger an electrical current causing severe burns and tissue damage within 2 hours. This results in serious injury that may require surgery, or even the death of the child.

Dr Michael Shepherd, Clinical Director of the Children’s Emergency Department at Starship Children’s Hospital and co-author of the research paper ‘Button battery injury in children—a primary care issue’ published recently in the Journal of Primary Health Care, said rapid response is needed when a child is suspected to have ingested or inserted a button battery.

“Symptoms of button battery exposure, such as coughing, drooling, loss of appetite and discomfort, are similar to other common illnesses and so this problem can be difficult to detect,” Dr Shepherd said.

“If there is a possibility that a child has swallowed a button battery or inserted it in their nose or ear, they should be taken to the nearest hospital emergency department immediately to prevent severe injury,” Dr. Shepherd added.

Often small children are reluctant to say if they have swallowed a button battery and even when children have X-rays, button batteries can be mistaken for a coin. “A high level of suspicion is required among medical staff to diagnose button battery ingestion or insertion and arrange for urgent removal.” Dr Shepherd said.

The Battery Controlled partnership, led by Safekids Aotearoa and Energizer, also invites agencies, organisations, community groups and individuals to help share important safety messages to parents and caregivers SEARCH, SECURE, SHARE & GET HELP FAST:

- SEARCH your home, and any place your child goes, for gadgets that may contain button batteries.
- SECURE button battery-controlled devices out of sight and reach of babies and small children, and keep loose batteries locked away.
- SHARE this life-saving information with caregivers, friends, family and whanau.

- GET HELP FAST if you suspect a child has swallowed or inserted a button battery. Take the child to a hospital emergency department immediately.

According to Safekids Aotearoa child injuries related to the ingestion or insertion of button batteries is a growing concern. In the U.S. about 3,500 button battery swallowing cases are reported each year—a number that has quadrupled in recent years. In Australia, an estimated 4 children per week are taken to an emergency department with an injury related to a button battery.

In New Zealand, 61 button battery ingestion or insertion incidents presented at Starship Children's Hospital in the three year period March 2009 and February 2012. The National Poisons Centre has also received 175 button battery related calls from 2011–2013.

"Button batteries are found in everyday devices, such as mini remote control devices that unlock car doors and control MP3 speakers, calculators, bathroom scales, reading lights, flameless candles, talking and singing books and greeting cards," said Ann Weaver, Director of Safekids Aotearoa.

"Because many of the devices that use button batteries are not children's toys, the battery compartments are easy to open, even for babies and small children," Ms Weaver added.

The Battery Controlled is also working with manufacturers and retailers. Starting in April Energizer lithium coin-sized cell batteries will be available in child-resistant packaging, with a double-blister around the batteries, making it extremely difficult for younger children to access the batteries from the packs.

Energizer has also added easily understood icons on the front of the package to encourage parents to keep the batteries away from small children, along with information on what to do if a child swallows a button battery.

The New Zealand Retail Association and Trading Standards, an operational unit in the Consumer Protection and Standards branch of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, are working with other battery manufacturers and retailers to help educate consumers.

A research project is also currently underway at Victoria University School of Design in Wellington, which hopes to develop child-safe button batteries and packaging.

Organisations and individuals are invited to be a partner of *The Battery Controlled*. To find out more, visit www.TheBatteryControlled.co.nz.

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About Safekids Aotearoa

Safekids Aotearoa is the injury prevention service of Starship Children's Health and a member of SAFE KIDS Worldwide. Our mission is to reduce the incidence and severity of unintentional injuries to New Zealand's children aged 0 - 14 years. For more information, contact Anthony Rola at anthonyr@adhb.govt.nz, visit www.safekids.org.nz or call 09 631 0717.

About Energizer

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