

Magnet ingestion injuries on the rise among children

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Credit: National Center for Biotechnology Information

(Medical Xpress)—With many new toys hitting store shelves this holiday season, there is a lot to consider when picking the perfect gift for a child. While young ones may be creating their wish lists with a focus on the coolest new gadgets, buyers need to pay careful attention to product warning labels regarding what is age appropriate. Cases of children swallowing toys are becoming more prevalent in emergency rooms and could lead to emergency surgery, and possible long-term hospitalization.

The risk of ingestion is especially worrisome with magnets, like those used in building sets and other toys. Just this month, the popular magnetic Buckyballs and Buckycubes, marketed as desk toys, were

discontinued because of the threat they posed to children when swallowed.

"When multiple high-powered magnets are swallowed, their attraction is so strong they can tear through internal walls, creating holes in the intestines and causing life threatening situations that require surgery," said Vibha Sood, M.D., pediatric gastroenterology fellow at Golisano Children's Hospital at University of Rochester Medical Center (URMC). "Any exposure to a magnetic object should be strongly cautioned and avoided."

The North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (NASPGHAN) has stated that warning labels are not enough to prevent children from ingesting magnetic toys. The group released results of a recent survey of more than 1,700 doctors, who reported at least 480 toy magnet ingestions in the past decade, with 204 occurring in the past year. The survey also reported that 50.4 percent of patients are between the ages of 1 and 6, while 33.6 percent are 6 to 12 years old.

Labels that distinguish what is age appropriate are repeatedly disregarded and individuals are often too young or embarrassed to convey what they have swallowed.

As we near the holiday shopping season, Anne Brayer, M.D., pediatrician in [Emergency Medicine](#) at URMC and director of Injury Free Coalition for Kids of Rochester, offers tips on how to prevent ingestion of toy parts and overall advice as to what consumers should be paying attention to while purchasing safe items for children.

Read the labels – Always check labels to make sure a toy is right for a child's age. Consider the child's temperament, habits, and behavior when picking out a new toy. Use the age and safety recommendations, created

by national standards, as a guide. Even if you feel a child can developmentally handle a toy labeled as being appropriate for older individuals, stay on the safe side and do not purchase it.

Avoid toys with small, detachable parts – Toy parts should be larger than the child's mouth. Pay attention to the durability of the toy and that it has tightly secured parts. Parents should purchase a Choke Tube Tester, or use the top of a gallon-size milk jug, to examine the safety level of the toy. If a toy can fit in the opening of the tube, or jug, it is a choking hazard for children 3 years of age or younger.

Know the child's surroundings – Consider the ages of all who may have access to the toy. An item that is meant for an older child could get in the hands of younger family members or neighbors and become a choking hazard.

Stay informed and aware – After purchasing toys, regularly survey the child's play area for any small pieces, missing parts or dislodged magnets. Be sure that the child knows how to play with the toy safely.

"It is important for consumers to be aware of the dangers many [toys](#) pose to children," said Brayer. "Being proactive about toy safety can help prevent emergency situations before it may be too late."

Individuals can also check government sites on the Internet, such as the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and www.recalls.gov, to see if the toy they are interested in purchasing has been recalled.

Provided by University of Rochester Medical Center

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