

Study shows parents' knowledge of button battery safety falls flat

July 4 2024, by Griffith Thomas



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Two-thirds of Australian parents don't know the symptoms of button battery ingestion, according to an Australian-first study by University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) researchers.

The study, "You can be as vigilant as you can, yet they make their way in: A descriptive study of parent and caregiver perspectives towards button battery [safety](#)," [published](#) in the *Journal of Pediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition*, also identified significant knowledge gaps regarding the safe disposal of [button batteries](#).

Button batteries are found in many common household devices such as watches, [hearing aids](#), calculators, remote controls and toys.

If swallowed, a button battery can become stuck in a child's esophagus and cause serious damage in as little as 15 minutes, and can lead to lifelong issues with swallowing and eating or, in severe cases, death.

"While the survey found that most parents and caregivers know the dangers of button battery ingestion, it's quite concerning only one-third of respondents know the common signs a child has swallowed a button battery include difficulty eating, coughing, drooling and vomiting," Dr. Anna Girardi, the study's lead author, said.

"This lack of knowledge could delay appropriate medical care and worsen outcomes."

The study, which surveyed 174 parents and caregivers of children aged up to five, also showed that only half of the respondents knew how to dispose of a button battery safely.

"Respondents generally understood the importance of child supervision and prioritized battery safety in toy purchases. However, there was notable dissatisfaction with current safety labels and warnings," Dr. Girardi said.

"This was the first published, targeted Australian study to examine parents' knowledge about the potential dangers of button batteries and

safety practices.

"It not only suggests the need for ongoing comprehensive education and public safety campaigns to address the gaps in knowledge, but also highlights the importance of improved safety labeling and efforts by retailers to prevent button battery access."

About 20 children are rushed to emergency departments in Australia each week suspected of having swallowed or inserted a button battery.

Despite new button battery safety standards becoming mandatory in Australia in June 2022 to reduce the risk of death and injury, non-compliant products are still making their way into Australian homes.

Product Safety Australia recently recalled a Garfield toy included in Hungry Jack's children's meals because its packaging didn't warn about the button battery inside the toy.

It follows the Eras Tour bungle, in which hundreds of thousands of wristbands were distributed during Taylor Swift's Melbourne concerts earlier this year without a warning that they contained button batteries.

Allison Burns OAM, the mother of Isabella Rees, who died at the age of 14 months after ingesting a button battery, and founder of Bella's Footprints, said the findings from the UniSQ study underlined that the message wasn't getting through.

"While we've seen an increase in awareness of the dangers of button batteries, we're falling behind in the knowledge of the signs and symptoms of button battery ingestion and how to dispose of button batteries safely," Ms. Burns said.

"Any new research about button battery safety helps to support our

mission of raising awareness in Australia. Hopefully, it will also help encourage government bodies to get involved and put together national campaigns to reach as many families as we can."

More information: Anna M. Girardi et al, You can be as vigilant as you can, yet they make their way in: A descriptive study of parent and caregiver perspectives towards keeping children safe from button batteries, *JPGN Reports* (2024). [DOI: 10.1002/jpr3.12096](https://doi.org/10.1002/jpr3.12096)

Provided by University of Southern Queensland

Citation: Study shows parents' knowledge of button battery safety falls flat (2024, July 4) retrieved 4 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-07-parents-knowledge-button-battery-safety.html>

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