



SUBJECT: **BUTTON BATTERIES**

RECIPIENTS: All Schools

ISSUE DATE: 10/11/17 REF: HSB95



Surgeons are warning of the potentially deadly risk posed to young children by button batteries

Button battery burn after one hour of exposure on a piece of sliced ham



1. **Those at higher risk** include children under six, the elderly and those who may self-harm.
2. **Button batteries** can be found in toys, hearing aids, weighing scales, remote controls, small torches and clocks
3. As part of a **formal risk assessment process** you may be able to eliminate button batteries from your place of work by checking, securing monitoring or removing unused equipment or by replacing equipment with safer alternatives.

Button batteries should be treated like poison and kept out of reach of children

If swallowed, the small, round batteries can get lodged in the oesophagus and burn a hole through its lining. Ingestion of button batteries can cause serious harm and death. Severe tissue damage from a build-up of sodium hydroxide (caustic soda) is a result of the electrical current discharged from the battery, and not, as commonly supposed, from leakage from the battery. Burns, often in the oesophagus, can cause catastrophic haemorrhage.

Even ('flat') batteries can still have this effect, and button batteries pushed into ears or nostrils can also cause serious injuries. Button battery ingestion affects all age groups, although most cases involve children under the age of six who mistake the battery for a sweet or older people who mistake the battery for a pill. Older children and adults may ingest batteries as a means of self-harming.

Removal of a battery alone may be insufficient action to prevent further damage, with further symptoms manifesting later. Whilst the focus of this alert is on prompt recognition and treatment of ingestion, providers caring for children, vulnerable adults or people who may self-harm should consider if action to protect persons from button battery ingestion needs to be taken. A review of incidents identified six occasions when older patients accidentally swallowed button batteries from hearing aids. Respiratory difficulties can manifest up to 28 days after ingestion of the battery. Incident reports suggested that where such symptoms occur, staff did not always consider the possibility of prior button battery ingestion.

If you require further assistance or clarification on the subject please contact:
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