

The New Jersey Poison Control Center — Serving New Jersey Since 1983

## NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

### Tiny but Dangerous

#### Bite-Sized Batteries and Strong Magnets Hide in Plain Sight

(New Jersey) – Some common household items may be small, but they pose a sizable injury risk for crawling infants, young children, and pets. Seemingly harmless items including watches, toys, electronics, key fobs, hearing aids, digital thermometers, and singing greeting cards contain “bite-sized” batteries that can cause serious, even deadly injuries if swallowed or placed in the nose or ear. Like many other items found at home, lithium batteries (also called button or coin batteries) are also a choking hazard.

“Most parents and caregivers are unaware that the toys and everyday items their young children come in contact with contain these potentially dangerous batteries,” says Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](http://NJPoisonCenter.org) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](http://RutgersNewJerseyMedicalSchool.edu). “It does not take very long for a battery to begin to cause serious injury once it gets stuck inside the body. Internal chemical burns can result quickly, producing serious, even permanent damage to the esophagus and other internal organs.” Even “dead” batteries cause injury.

Last year in 2023, the New Jersey Poison Control Center’s medical providers were consulted on the management of 38 children and 17 adults who swallowed button batteries. Along with batteries, strong magnets found in toys can also cause devastating, internal damage if swallowed. In the same year, the center’s providers were consulted on 56 children and 4 adults who swallowed magnets.

“Not only are magnets a choking hazard, but if two or more magnets are swallowed together, they can attract one another inside the body, causing a blockage or twist in the intestines,” says Calello. “A single magnet may pass through just fine, but two or more is likely to lead to serious injury.”

It is important to take notice of home items that are missing small batteries or magnets. This could be the first indication that a young child or pet has swallowed such items. Pets are curious just like young children. It’s easy for them to swallow small batteries or magnets from an item left around the home.

Pets can also suffer the same serious and fatal health consequences. If you think your pet has swallowed a battery or magnet, call your veterinarian or local animal hospital immediately for the next steps. Ingesting these items is a medical emergency for pets too.

“Whether you see your child swallow any of these items or suspect he or she did, immediate medical attention is required,” says Calello. “Do not wait for symptoms to develop, irreversible damage may have

occurred by the time signs appear. This was the case a few years ago in New Jersey when a young child died after ingesting a button battery.”

It's far easier to prevent a tragedy than to treat one. Here are safety tips to prevent accidental ingestions.

- Check battery compartments of common household items to make sure the compartment is closed tightly. You can put a piece of tape over the compartment to help keep it closed.
- If battery compartments are not secured by screws, prevent children or pets from having access to those items. The same goes for items containing magnets.
- Store spare batteries like medicine — up high and out of sight and reach. Keeping them in a locked area is safest.
- Immediately throw out “dead” batteries, but make sure children and pets can't find them in the garbage. Dead batteries still have enough charge to burn through internal tissue, causing considerable damage.
- Batteries and magnets are accidentally ingested by adults too. Do not put them in your mouth for any reason because saliva makes them slippery and easy to swallow.

For further information, read Dr. Calello's interview with [WebMD](#).

Swallowing button batteries or strong magnets is a medical emergency. If you think someone swallowed one of these items, contact the New Jersey Poison Control Center immediately for medical treatment advice. Anyone can call for help – children, teens, and adults. Poison control centers are a medical resource for both the public and healthcare professionals. Get help 24/7 — Call 1-800-222-1222 or [Chat Here](#). If someone is not breathing, hard to wake up, or having a seizure, call 9-1-1.

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**Available for Media Interviews**

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**About New Jersey Poison Control Center/NJPIES, 1-800-222-1222**

Chartered in 1983, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES), known to the public as the New Jersey Poison Control Center, is the state's primary defense against injury and deaths from intentional and unintentional poisonings. It is designated as the state's regional poison control center by the New Jersey Department of Health and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It is a division of the Department of Emergency Medicine at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. NJPIES has a state-of-the-art center located at Rutgers Health in Newark. NJPIES is funded, in part, by the NJ Department of Health, NJ Hospitals and the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Hotline staff (physicians, registered nurses, and pharmacists) provide free, telemedicine consultation through hotline services (telephone, text, chat) regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention practices, drug interactions and overdoses, food poisoning, environmental chemical exposures, animal/insect bites and stings, plant and other outdoor exposures, carbon monoxide and lead poisonings, and more. NJPIES' services are free, confidential/private, available 24/7, and help is available in any language. Call 1-800-222-1222 or [Chat Here](#).

**About Rutgers New Jersey Medical School**

Founded in 1954, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School is the oldest school of medicine in the state. Today it is part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and graduates approximately 170 physicians a year. In addition to providing the MD degree, the school offers MD/PhD, MD/MPH and MD/MBA degrees through collaborations with other institutions of higher education. Dedicated to excellence in education, research, clinical care and

community outreach, the medical school comprises 20 academic departments and works with several healthcare partners, including its principal teaching hospital, University Hospital. Its faculty consists of numerous world-renowned scientists and many of the region's "top doctors." Home to the nation's oldest student-run clinic, New Jersey Medical School hosts more than 50 centers and institutes, including the Public Health Research Institute Center, the Global Tuberculosis Institute and the Neurological Institute of New Jersey. For more information please visit: [njms.rutgers.edu](http://njms.rutgers.edu).

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