

Risks associated with button batteries

Button batteries are flat, round, single cell batteries with diameters up to 32 mm. They are also known as coin or disc batteries and are used in a broad range of products including remote controls, watches, computers, calculators, torches, fitness devices, digital scales, thermometers and musical greeting cards. Some of these items may be found in schools and childcare centres.



[Mandatory national standards](#) exist to reduce the risk of death and injury associated with the use of button batteries. Unfortunately, ongoing [product recalls](#) show that non-compliant products are still available for sale. Novelty items at fetes and fundraisers e.g. flashing jewelry, seasonal toys with flashing lights or sound effects pose risks due to poor design and attractiveness for small children.

Hazards

Button batteries contain a corrosive alkaline electrolyte partnered with lithium or silver oxide. They pose a severe injury risk or **potentially fatal internal corrosive burns if swallowed for young and/or vulnerable children** who may place small objects into their mouths, ears and noses due to:

- ease of access
- their **small size** creating a **choking hazard**

Serious injuries can occur in as little as two hours as the electric current in button batteries (not leaking battery acid) turns saliva or moisture from the body into a caustic solution. The resultant chemical burns can be fatal, even from 'flat' batteries. If you suspect a child has swallowed or inserted a button battery, call the Poisons Information Centre immediately on **13 11 26** for expert advice. If a child is having any difficulty breathing, contact 000. **Prompt action is critical. Do not wait for symptoms to develop.**

- Some batteries now release a bitter blue dye, easily noticeable on hands and the mouth to indicate mouthing, ingestion or insertion of a button battery. This is important as [symptoms](#) after swallowing are not always immediately recognisable. Ensure staff are alert to this change.

Button batteries also have a low but real risk of igniting if they are damaged, not fully discharged, or if they short-circuit.

Actions required

Check the school/centre/workplace for products that contain button batteries or have loose (spare) button batteries.

- Eliminate non-compliant products or poor quality products that may release button batteries when dropped or broken; properly dispose of them.
- For essential equipment manufactured prior to the introduction of mandatory standards consider disposal, otherwise duct tape over button battery compartments in devices to prevent accidental release should the battery compartment break open.

- Avoid buying products powered by button batteries - use alternate power sources such as rechargeable or cylinder batteries, or solar powered devices

If you must buy a product powered by button batteries, only buy products that are:

- secured with a child-resistant locking mechanism e.g. a captive screw, a bolt or mechanism that requires a tool to gain access to the batteries **or** a battery compartment that requires two or more independent, and simultaneous actions to remove its cover.
- *Note:* Hearing aids (and any related accessories) are exempt from secure battery requirements but are subject to label warning requirements. Audio visual and information communications technology equipment containing button batteries that are soldered in place are also exempt.

Check for button batteries in storage:

- ensure they are in child-resistant packaging that require scissors to access and are stored securely away from the reach of students. Packaging must carry warnings that button batteries are hazardous to young children.
- store loose and open battery packets in a child-resistant container labelled with contents and hazard warning.

Regularly check devices with button batteries to make sure battery compartments are secure.

- Dispose of unwanted or spent batteries as soon as possible. Wrap them in sticky tape to make them less attractive to children, prevent short-circuiting and avoid the low risk of having them catch fire. Once taped, store batteries in a labelled child-proof container until disposal at a designated battery recycling drop-off location e.g. hardware or supermarket retailers, battery world etc.

How to encase in sticky tape when disposing



Batteries encased in tape



Image source: Association for Battery Recycling Industry (ABRI)

Further information:

ACCC Factsheet: [Button/coin batteries and consumer goods containing button/coin batteries](#)

Kidsafe Queensland: [Button batteries campaign](#)