

## 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 batteries or disc batteries. Button batteries 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 are in our schools and centres already. Novelty items at fetes and fundraisers e.g. flashing jewelry, seasonal toys with flashing lights and sound effects pose risks due to their 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 **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**
- risk of **potentially fatal internal corrosive burns if swallowed.**



Serious injuries can occur in as little as two hours as the electric current in button batteries (not leaking battery acid) turns saliva 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.**

Button batteries also have a low but real risk of igniting if they are damaged, not fully discharged, or if they short-circuit. The *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* has introduced [mandatory standards](#) to reduce the risk of death and injury associated with the use of button and coin batteries. Unfortunately, ongoing [product recalls](#) show that non-compliant products are still sometimes available for sale.

### Actions required

Check the school/workplace for products that contain button batteries or have loose (spare) button batteries. Eliminate non-compliant products and properly dispose of them. Ensure products:

- have a battery compartment (or other enclosure) that is secured (preferably with a captive screw, a bolt or mechanism) such that it requires a tool to gain access to the batteries **or** have a battery compartment that requires two or more independent, and simultaneous actions to remove its cover. Hearing aids (and any related accessories) are exempt from secure battery requirements, but are subject to warning requirements (see below). Audio visual and information communications technology equipment containing button/coin batteries that are soldered in place are also exempt.
- of poor quality which may release button batteries when dropped or broken are removed from service. Where equipment is required and was 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.

Check for button batteries in storage:

- ensure they are in approved packaging (i.e., 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 container labelled with contents and hazard warning that requires use of a tool, key or two or more independent AND simultaneous actions to open i.e., a childproof container.

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

Dispose of unwanted or used 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.

#### Different sized button batteries



#### 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](#)