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SCHOOL'S OUT

Students heading off to leavers will be open to many temptations, but protecting their sexual health is easy and help is on hand. P4

SAFETY SWITCH

Accidents happen, but keeping children safe around the home is easier with a few little changes, writes **Connie Clarke**

They are tiny — the size of a 5¢ piece and smaller — but button batteries, along with backyard pools and toppling furniture, are prompting summer safety warnings from emergency specialists.

Kidsafe WA reports that three out of four serious injuries to young children occur in the place they should feel most safe — the home.

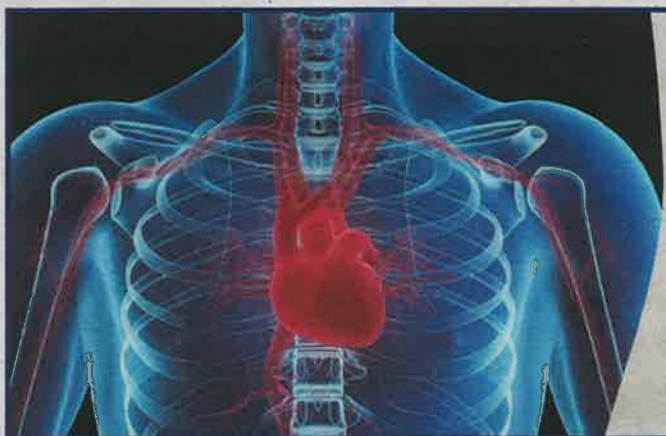
Although falls account for the biggest number of injuries, button batteries are a growing concern, with an average four children presenting to emergency departments across the country each week after swallowing the lithium cells.

Used to power everything from toys to electronic scales and remote controls, they can cause severe internal damage when the electric current they emit causes sodium hydroxide, or caustic soda, to build up and burn through the oesophagus and into major blood vessels.

Meredith Borland, head of Princess Margaret Hospital's emergency department, said the school holidays and the festive

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season increased injury risks in the home. Despite parents' best efforts, injuries could occur in seconds.

Professor Borland said recent tragedies, including a Yokine toddler killed last month when a chest of drawers fell on him and a two-year-old Carramar boy who died after falling into a suburban swimming pool, highlighted the need for parents to stay alert.

"We don't want helicopter parents — children need to learn, explore and experiment, and broken bones and cuts are all part of their development, but there are some areas where parents need to be vigilant," she said. "Strict supervision around water is really important."

"It takes seconds for a small child to get to the edge of a pool and slide in, and it's silent — there is usually no splash and children make very little noise when they are drowning."

Button batteries were more common in homes after Christmas when new toys, cards and devices containing them were given as gifts.

"It was not known until recently the severe damage that button batteries can do — in some serious cases they can erode through the arteries, and they have killed children," Professor Borland said.

"Most of the toys now have them screwed in, but in other devices like remote controls, they are easy to access. The safest bet is to not have the devices lying around the house, and to store any spare batteries away securely."

Kidsafe WA chief executive Scott Phillips said button batteries were especially dangerous because they could emit an electrical charge even when they appeared "dead", and parents did not always realise their child had swallowed one in the first place.

'We don't want helicopter parents — children need to learn, explore and experiment, and broken bones and cuts are all part of their development, but there are some areas where parents need to be vigilant.'

Prof Meredith Borland

"They only need a slight charge to cause a problem, and if they are ingested and lodge in a little one's throat, they can burn through in a couple of hours."

Meanwhile, parents are again being urged to renew their first-aid training, particularly since children will be swimming in backyards across the State for the next five months. In WA, approximately half of toddler drowning deaths occur in swimming pools.

"Swimming pools, or any body of water, are a big concern," Professor Borland said.

"This time of year we see an increase in all injuries — typically they involve falls and broken bones, but we also treat some very serious life-threatening injuries. We see a lot of near-misses, especially in backyard pools, and sadly children sometimes die."

St John Ambulance first-aid trainer Rondel Dancer said rising temperatures meant children were susceptible to dehydration, burns to their feet and severe sunburn in their own backyards.

"We're very good as parents packing everything we need for a day down at the beach — we take everything including extra water, hats and sunscreens," Ms Dancer said. "But, in the comfort of our own backyards, we can lose track of time, and kids can be playing for hours in the sun unprotected."

Ms Dancer said toddlers were especially vulnerable around any body of water because their centre of gravity made it easy for them to fall headfirst into a bucket or pond as they leaned in to explore. Delivering first aid to someone who was drowning while waiting for an ambulance to arrive increased their chance of survival by more than 50 per cent, she said.

BE AWARE

DANGERS AROUND

Parents don't need to panic, just to be practical
children safe from everyday dangers

Kitchen

- All hazardous items should be placed in a child-resistant, locked cupboard or drawer.
- Keep hot cups of tea or pots and pans out of reach of small children.
- Install safety locks to prevent access to ovens and cupboards, and to stop fingers getting jammed in doors and drawers.

**Laundry**

- Restrict young children's access to the laundry where possible and use safety locks on cupboards storing cleaning products.
- Drain water from sinks and buckets to prevent drowning and fit hot-water-tempering valves to prevent scalds.
- Unplug irons after use and keep them stored away and out of sight.
- Install front-loading dryers at least 1400mm above floor level to prevent young children climbing into them.
- Turn dryers and washing machines off at the wall when not in use.

Bathroom

- Place non-slip mats or stickers on the bottom of baths and showers for extra grip.
- Restrict access to the toilet as inquisitive toddlers are at risk of falling in.
- Never leave hair dryers, straighteners or electric razors unattended.
- Install child-resistant locks on bathroom cupboards and drawers where personal-hygiene products and medicines are stored.
- Always empty the bath immediately after use.
- Never leave children alone in the bath, or in the care of older children.

**Living rooms**

- Smoke detectors are recommended in the main living area, where many house fires start. Test smoke detectors monthly to ensure they are in good working order.
- Use corner protectors on benches and coffee tables to minimise harm from bumps and falls, and avoid buying coffee tables with glass tops.
- Avoid slippery highly polished floors, or use rug grips to prevent slipping.
- Turn heaters off overnight and fit fireplaces with a safety guard.
- Place televisions on stable and fixed cabinets or fix to the wall and keep electrical cords out of reach.
- Secure excess curtain and blind cords to the wall at least 1600mm above the ground to prevent strangulation.
- Steps and stairs should be well-lit and non-slip.



UND THE HOME

in taking simple measures to keep their
ers, writes CONNIE CLARKE



Furniture

- Keep drawers and cupboards secured. Children will pull out drawers and use them as a ladder to reach items on the top.
- Resist putting vases and toys on top of heavy furniture to minimise temptation.

Bedrooms

- Place heavier items in the lower drawers to minimise toppling.
- Do not place items that children may want on the top of drawers; it encourages climbing.
- Position all cots, beds, play structures and change tables away from windows because they act as ladders and keep windows locked where possible.
- Always keep one hand on the baby when using change tables and never leave the child alone, even when you are in the room.



Backyard

- Check gate latches on swimming pool fences are working properly and locked when the pool is not being used. Remove anything that could help a child climb over a fence.
- Cut off sharp branches that hang at the child's eye level.
- Empty paddling pools immediately after use and store upright.
- Always watch children near barbecues and open fires and dress them in low-fire-risk clothes.
- Use play equipment that complies with the Australian Standards and regularly check it for wear and tear.
- Always supervise children around dogs.

Sheds and garages

- Fit locks on sheds that young children are unable to open.
- Close garage doors to prevent young children from getting to the front yard and roadway.
- Lock away poisons such as chemicals, fertilisers and paints in their original containers.
- Return all gardening equipment to the shed or garage immediately after use.

The driveway

- If you have small children, check around the vehicle before you move it.
- Don't let young children play in the driveway. Because of their height it's very hard to see them in rear-vision mirrors.

Falls big cause of child injuries

PMH emergency department figures show that children under five made up about 40 per cent of all injuries seen over the past 12 months, followed by adolescents and teenagers aged between 10-14, at 29 per cent.

Falls are responsible for more than a third of all admissions in all age groups, and wheeled devices such as scooters, skateboards and rollerblades account for close to 10 per cent of all injuries.

Cuts, burns and drowning incidents feature strongly in the figures recorded from July 2014-June 2015. Just under 2 per cent involved poisonings and close to 3 per cent were caused by bites and stings.

PMH head of emergency Meredith Borland said burns also were common injuries seen in children, usually during the winter months, but burnt feet from coming into contact with hot bitumen were becoming increasingly common in younger age groups.

Teenagers usually sustained injuries related to taking risks, such as diving into shallow water, or experimenting with alcohol and then riding a wheeled device.

Kidsafe WA chief executive Scott Phillips said parents should check safety features and implement strict rules around using play equipment such as trampolines, bikes and skateboards.

Supervision was a crucial factor, particularly when hosting large numbers of people. "There should always be adults who are not drinking supervising the pool, the driveway and the barbecue area," he said.

Children who went unnoticed or unseen could move into the path of a moving vehicle, knock over barbecues, fall into swimming pools, drink alcohol or swallow medications that were left within reach.

First aid vital in emergencies

There is no substitute for good first aid in any life-threatening situation, according to St John Ambulance training team leader Rondel Dancer, especially when a young child is in trouble in their own home.

"Getting the right training and making sure you have a well-stocked first-aid kit can make a huge difference to whether a child survives their injury, and the time it takes for them to recover," Ms Dancer said.

"If you're ever in doubt when a child is injured or swallows something, ring for an ambulance. The officers can help you assess the situation or put you in touch with Health Direct or the Poisons Information Centre for help."

Some important items to include in a first-aid kit were dressings for falls or sprained ankles, ointments, creams or antiseptics to treat insect bites and stings and paracetamol for pain relief. Every family also should have at least one person trained in first aid, she said.

■ To book a first-aid course, visit stjohnambulance.com.au.

TIPS

- If a child is pulled out of water unconscious, their airway should be checked. If the child is not breathing, start CPR immediately. Once breathing, place the child on his or her side in the recovery position until the ambulance arrives. Check for breathing every two minutes until help arrives.
- Any child who has ingested water during a drowning incident should be seen by a doctor because drowning can continue for hours if water has entered the lungs.
- Burn injuries should be run under cool running water for 20 minutes and covered with a non-stick dressing.

Where to get help

Ring **000** for any life-threatening emergency. Ring the Poisons Information Centre on **13 11 26** if your child or a friend comes into contact with a poison. Ring Health Direct on **1800 022 222** for general health advice.