



European Society for Paediatric
Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition

ESPGHAN

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Commissioner Stella Kyriakides
European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety
European Commission
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Dear Commissioner Kyriakides,

We are writing to you as a concerned collaborative of professional associations for child health to ask you for active help in protecting Europe's children facing rising incidence of severe button battery-related injuries.

The sales of button batteries (lithium coin batteries) in the EU have markedly increased over the past decade and continue to increase. Due to their size, they can easily and are often swallowed by children, in particular by children of a young age such as older infants and toddlers. If swallowed, button batteries cause time-critical and potentially fatal injuries. Residual battery charge (even in a largely exhausted battery) causes the breakdown of water and release of a caustic product (sodium hydroxide) equivalent to a pipe cleaner or oven cleaner. The oesophagus of young children can be damaged, which can induce strictures with lasting impairment of swallowing, and perforation of the oesophagus leading to serious infections and even death. European children's hospitals regularly see children suffering severely after accidental swallowing of button batteries, which as a rule require endoscopic removal in deep sedation or anaesthesia, and in too many children severe lasting impairment of health and quality of life. Every year in the United States, more than 2,800 children are treated in emergency rooms after swallowing button batteries – that is one child every three hours.

The number of serious child injuries or deaths due to swallowed button batteries in the USA is reported to have increased ninefold in the last decade due to the rapidly increasing use of button batteries in household devices (www.safekids.org/safetytips/field_risks/batteries). No firm data is available on the number of affected children in the European Union, but we assume an even higher number here.

In addition to young children, also older children, people of all ages with mental health challenges, and elderly people are victims of button battery ingestion.

The European Button Battery Task Force, which consists of the European Academy of Paediatrics (EAP), European Laryngological Society (ELS), European Society of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology (ESPO), European Congenital Heart Surgeon's Association (ECHSA), Child Health Foundation and the European Society of Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN), asks you to help improve the European regulations on the safety of button battery use to protect children and other people at risk. Adaptation of regulation is required as creating awareness via a European button battery awareness day launched by ESPGHAN (initiated by the European button battery task force under the lead of de Ridder) and writing papers (Mubarak, de Ridder. Diagnosis, Management, and Prevention of Button Battery Ingestion in Childhood: A European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition Position Paper. *J Pediatr Gastroenterol Nutr* 2021;73:129-36.) is just a first step.

Given that many injuries result from button batteries taken from their packages, we ask you to support the introduction of a European regulation stipulating that all button batteries sold in the EU must be sold only in child-proof packaging. Currently, some button batteries are sold in the EU in child-proof packaging based on voluntary manufacturer actions which show that these are technically and economically feasible, but the vast majority of such products are not.

We, therefore, ask you to support the extension of the regulations contained in the European Toy Safety Directive 2009/48/EC and the relevant European Standard EN62115, which stipulates that



all toys for use by children up to the age of 14 years sold in the European Union using button batteries must have a child proof battery compartment design. While this is highly welcomed, most casualties with ingested button batteries in children, and the resulting serious health damages, are not caused by batteries from toys but from the widely used small household devices that contain such coin batteries but are not required to have child-proof battery compartments. These devices include remote controls, thermometers, hearing aids, calculators, bathroom scales, key fobs, watches, electronic jewellery, and others. In the interest of protecting children from serious harm and even death, it is mandatory that the European Union extends the requirement for a child-proof battery compartment design for all household devices sold in the EU that use button batteries.

For your information, allow us to share that such steps have been taken in other jurisdictions:

- In December 2021, Australia introduced a requirement for button batteries to be packaged in child-resistant packaging, and all button battery-operated products to be durable, with child-resistant battery compartments (www.productsafety.gov.au/product-safety-laws/safety-standards-bans/mandatory-standards/button-and-coin-batteries)
- In the UK, in the wake of two child deaths, an independent report recommended that there should be a standard setting out safety requirements for button and coin batteries and the consumer products that use them. (<https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/standards/pas-70552021/>).
- In 2022, the US Congress also passed a bill, the so-called Reese's Law named after a toddler who died after ingesting a battery which requires that
 - a) battery compartments of all consumer products containing button cell or coin batteries must be secured in a manner that would eliminate or adequately reduce the risk of injury from button or coin cell battery ingestion by children that are 6 years of age or younger,
 - b) warning messages on the packaging of button cell coin batteries and of consumer products containing button cell or coin batteries (www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/5313/text).



We would greatly appreciate an opportunity to meet with you and your staff to provide further background on this critical but solvable challenge for child health and discuss possible solutions which we are more than happy to contribute.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Ulrich Baumann
President, European Society for Paediatric
Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition



Prof. Berthold Koletzko
Chairman of the Board,
Child Health Foundation

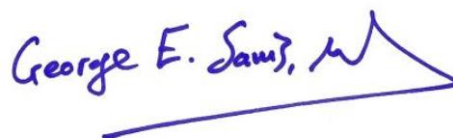


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