

media statement



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Magnets a deadly risk to children

The Office of Fair Trading is renewing its warning to parents about the dangers of magnetic toys following the recent death of a Queensland toddler.

Fair Trading product safety expert Dave Strachan said while magnets might seem harmless, if swallowed they could result in serious injury, emergency surgery and even death.

“Any product with magnets small enough to swallow is a risk to children,” Mr Strachan said.

“It’s easy to think that because magnets are small they won’t cause a choking hazard, but the issue is what happens as they pass through the digestive system.

“Unfortunately they can clamp parts of the digestive system together, causing life threatening injuries such as infections, perforations and obstructions.

“This renewed warning stems from the tragic death of a Queensland child late last year and is a stark reminder that this can happen to anyone’s child at any time.”

The matter of the toddler’s death is currently before the Coroner.

According to figures released by the Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit, in 2010 at least 10 magnet-related injuries are officially reported to emergency departments in Queensland each year.

However, the QISU estimates that the actual figure may be closer to 40.

“History shows that many children are either unable or unwilling to tell their parents or doctors that they’ve swallowed magnets and some have sustained life threatening or even fatal injuries as a result,” Mr Strachan said.

“One young girl in the United Kingdom swallowed several magnets that she was trying to use as fake tongue studs, but despite the severe symptoms, withheld the information for several days. She wound up with five bowel perforations and was admitted to intensive care.

“In another case, a toddler in the US swallowed magnets from his older sibling’s toy. He was too young to comprehend or articulate the information and died as a result of his injuries.”

Mr Strachan said while there were standards in place regarding strong magnets used in toys, it was extremely important parents kept all magnets out of reach of children.

“Young children should not have any access to magnetic toys and if older children are playing with magnetic toys they should be closely supervised, he said.

“I urge people to think twice before buying these types of items – don’t think this can’t happen to you.”

For information on product safety visit www.fairtrading.qld.gov.au or www.productsafety.gov.au or phone 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

Office of Fair Trading

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