



## THE ISSUE

Small powerful magnets used in jewellery, clothing accessories and other household items such as fridge magnets may pose a hazard if the item itself is small enough to be swallowed or if the small magnet breaks away from the product and is swallowed. A wide range of children's products such as building toys, dolls and action figures, alphabet and number magnets, science and craft kits, board games and vehicle sets contain small powerful magnets.

Health Canada urges parents and caregivers to take steps to avoid incidents with such products.

### POTENTIAL RISK TO HEALTH

**If a child swallows more than one magnet over a short period of time, the magnets can attract one another while travelling through the intestines. When this happens, the magnets can twist the intestines and create a blockage or they can slowly tear through the intestinal walls. The results can be very serious and even fatal.**

The x-ray image below shows a child's abdomen with three magnets that became attached across the intestines. The attachment caused the intestines to twist and become blocked, it also resulted in holes through the intestinal walls.



Photo and case description from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 2006, Vol. 55, No. 48, pp. 1296-1300.

Swallowing magnets happens quietly with no signs of physical distress or discomfort for many days. The symptoms may include vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach pain like a bad flu and parents may not seek medical attention until severe trauma has developed.

Two toy recalls were issued in 2006 in response to reports from the United States of serious incidents that happened because children swallowed more than one magnet. The incidents involved children aged 2 to 8 years and include the death of a 20 month old child.

Health Canada is not aware of any deaths of Canadian children from swallowing magnets. However, over an eleven year period ending in 2003, there were 96 recorded cases of children swallowing magnets. Even though the majority of cases (57%) involved children under three years of age, who tend to put things in their mouths, there were still numerous cases involving older children. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the cases involved children between the ages of three and five years, and fifteen percent (15%) of the incidents involved children between the ages of six and eight years. These cases demonstrate that the hazard of swallowing magnets is present for older children as well as the very young.



Facts for

HAZARDS OF INGESTING SMALL MAGNETS

The small magnets that are being used more frequently today in toys, novelty jewellery items, and other household items are particularly dangerous because the magnets can be very powerful. Magnetic jewellery is of concern because older children may use the products in their mouth to mimic a piercing and inadvertently swallow the magnets as a result.

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Teach children of all ages that small magnets or small items with attached magnets should never be placed in their mouth. Supervise children around products with magnets.
  - Seek immediate medical care for any child who has swallowed, or is suspected of having swallowed, one or more magnets.
  - Keep products with small magnets out of the reach of young children.
- Check products often to make sure they are in good condition. Look for magnets that may have been separated from toys and other products and immediately remove the magnets from the reach of young children.
  - Follow the safety warnings and manufacturer's age recommendations on children's toys. Keep toys intended for older children out of the reach of younger children.
  - Children under three years of age frequently mouth objects—small toys, small balls or small loose toy parts are dangerous choking, ingestion and inhalation hazards. These items must be kept out of reach. Know how your child plays—this can apply to older children who may still frequently mouth objects.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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