Top doctors issue warning on strong magnets

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Top children's doctors issue warning on super strong magnets

Doctors from the British Association of Paediatric Surgeons (BAPS) have issued a warning to parents about the dangers of super strong magnets.

The warning comes after a sharp increase in children needing emergency surgery for bowel complications caused by swallowing the tiny magnets.

Found in toys, jewellery and even fridge magnets, and often bought cheaply from online marketplaces, the magnets can be 10 times stronger than permitted by law.

Mr Ashish Desai, consultant paediatric surgeon at Royal London Hospital in London and the Honorary Secretary of BAPS said:

"Our doctors have seen a sharp increase in the numbers of children needing surgery. If swallowed, the magnets can stick together in the child's intestines or bowels, squeezing the tissue so the blood supply is cut off. This can cause significant damage within hours."

BAPS has partnered with the Child Accident Prevention Trust to support the Office of Product Safety and Standards campaign to raise awareness of the dangers and advise parents how to keep their children safe.

Katrina Phillips, Chief Executive of the **Child Accident Prevention Trust** said:

"Children can be left fighting for life after swallowing super strong magnets. But so few parents know about the dangers.

"We're really worried that, with the surge in sales from online marketplaces in the run-up to Christmas, more and more children will be exposed to serious harm.

"Our five tips help parents buy safely and keep their children safe. No parent wants the anguish of the long wait while their child is on the operating table."

Mr Desai warned that symptoms can be vague and added:

"Symptoms may be mistaken for a stomach bug or appendicitis. If your child has stomach pain, is vomiting or can't keep down fluids and there is a chance they may have swallowed these small magnets, please call 999 for an ambulance or go to A&E straight away."

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Five tips to keep children safe from dangerous magnets

Products on online marketplaces pose particular risks, as they may not follow UK safety standards on safe levels of magnetic strength.

Try to buy toys or gifts from a reputable retailer or a brand name you know, so you are sure they meet UK safety standards.

Look for warnings on packaging and online marketplaces, and don't give products with strong magnets to young children.

Keep older children's magnets away from small children and explain to older children why they need to keep them away from little sisters o

Talk to tweens and teens about the dangers of putting magnets in or near their mouths or swallowing them.

Source: Child Accident Prevention Trust www.capt.org.uk/magnets

Case study: Three-year-old Albie

Holly Astirbadi's three-year-old son, Albie, needed open surgery at Evelina London Children's Hospital after swallowing six of the magnetic

Holly, from Gravesend in Kent, said: "My other son has autism so we had a toy, which contained the magnets, to help him focus. The balls could have caused serious damage. If I had known what could happen, I would not have had any of those magnets in the house."

An X-ray showed Albie had five magnetic balls connected in a line in his intestine, with a sixth ball in his stomach holding them all in place.

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Notes to editors

1. The British Association of Paediatric Surgeons endeavours to raise standards in paediatric surgery through education and research.
2. The Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) is the UK's leading charity working to reduce the number of children and young people killed, disabled or seriously injured in accidents. For more information, visit capt.org.uk
3. The Office of Product Safety and Standards is giving guidance on magnets safety https://www.gov.uk/guidance/my-safety-magnets
   and has launched a campaign to raise awareness of the dangers https://www.gov.uk/government/news/opss-raises-awareness-on-magnets-safety

4. The Office for Product Safety and Standards has previously issued a product safety alert on super strong magnets www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-safety-alert-issued-for-small-high-powered-magnetic-products. This advises online marketplaces about their responsibilities.
5. The Office of Product Safety and Standards launched their magnets safety campaign in March 2021 www.gov.uk/government/news/opss-launches-magnet-safety-campaign

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