

# This Just In...

The latest parenting news, research, and health tips from our experts



## Magnetic Toys Pose a Serious Hazard to Children

**There is an important warning** out for all parents of small children: Small magnets, like those in magnetic building sets and other toys, can kill children if two or more are swallowed. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is aware of at least 33 cases of children being injured from swallowing magnets. A 20-month-old died, and at least 19 other children ranging in age from 10 months to 11 years old required surgery to remove them. In many cases, magnets were swallowed after falling out of larger toy parts. In some instances, children swallowed intact toy parts containing magnets.

Although magnets have been in children's toys for years, "the introduction of so-called 'rare-earth' magnets in children's toys has given rise to a new injury hazard for children," testified Dr. Kyran Quinlan on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) before the Senate Appropriations Committee last spring. "Simply stated, these are not your parents' magnets. Rare-earth magnets are approximately 10 times stronger than even the strongest "traditional" magnets (known as "ferrite" magnets). As a result, they are able to exert a powerful attractive field even through human tissue."

If two or more magnets, magnetic parts, or a magnet and another metal object (such as a small metal ball) are swallowed separately, they can attract one another through intestinal walls. This traps the magnets in place — a tendency that can wreak medical havoc by causing holes (perforations), twisting and/or blockage of the intestines, infection, blood poisoning (sepsis), and possibly even become fatal. When multiple magnets are ingested, surgery is often required to remove the magnets, and sometimes sections of the intestines need to be removed. The CPSC cautions the public that small magnets found in other non-toy products may present the same hazard.

According to Dr. Quinlan, the injuries caused by these magnets are especially harmful because the symptoms don't clearly point to the magnets. "Children come to the doctor's office or hospital with abdominal pain, vomiting, or diarrhea," he said. "These symptoms may not quickly reveal the correct cause, leading to further deterioration of

the child's condition. These magnets can be extremely small, meaning that parents may not be aware that they have fallen out of a toy or been swallowed by a child. Together, these factors result in a unique and serious health hazard for children."

While the CPSC has issued no fewer than six recalls for children's toys, including Magnetix building sets and Polly Pockets, the recalls have caused confusion among parents, says Dr. Quinlan. "The upshot of these confusing recalls is that unsafe toys remain in children's homes and are able to continue causing severe preventable injuries," Dr. Quinlan testified. "The AAP urges Congress to examine the CPSC's authority to issue clear, compelling, effective recalls that are easily understood by parents and consumers."

To help prevent serious injuries from swallowed magnets:

- **Keep current on recalls.** The recall of these tiny magnets was expanded in mid-August. Check [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) to make sure your children's magnetic toys are not recalled products or to sign up to receive e-mail notifications when toys are recalled.
- **Be on the lookout.** Keep an eye out for loose magnetic pieces and vacuum floors thoroughly. Magnets can stick to places adults don't usually notice, but babies do — such as metal chair legs or the bottom of the fridge. Keep small magnets and small pieces containing magnets away from young children.
- **Regularly inspect toys.** Make it a habit to check toys and children's play areas for any missing or dislodged magnets.
- **Seek immediate medical attention** if you suspect your child may have swallowed a magnet.
- **Watch for suspect symptoms.** Pay attention to non-specific abdominal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and/or pain, especially if there's a chance that magnets might be involved.



## Inner Ear Abnormality May Offer Clues to SIDS

**The mysterious and heartbreaking disorder** of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) has devastated many families and confounded medical researchers. But a new study by Dr. Daniel D. Rubens of Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center in Seattle may bring doctors one step closer to unraveling this mystery. In this study, medical records and hearing tests of 31 babies who died from SIDS in Rhode Island were examined and compared to healthy babies. The results, published in the July 2007 issue of *Early Human Development*, found all 31 babies shared the same difference in their newborn hearing test results as compared to infants who did not have SIDS.

If this research bears out, doctors might be able to identify newborns at risk for SIDS by a simple, affordable, and routine hearing test given shortly after birth. In the study, medical records and hearing tests of the babies who died from SIDS in Rhode Island were examined and compared to healthy babies.

Various causes of SIDS have been suggested, including disturbances in respiratory control and infant overheating; but nothing has conclusively proved to be the cause of this devastating syndrome. It is known, however, that the inner ear contains tiny hairs that help with both hearing and vestibular, or balancing, functions. Dr. Rubens proposes that vestibular hair cells are important in sending information to the brain about carbon dioxide levels in the blood. He argues that injury to these cells will disrupt breathing control, which could play a critical role in raising an infant's risk of SIDS.

The SIDS infants in Dr. Rubens' study had consistently lower standard newborn hearing test scores, when compared to babies who didn't die from SIDS. Also, healthy infants typically test stronger in the right ear than the left. But in each of the SIDS cases studied, the right ear tested lower than the left.

"This discovery opens a whole new line of inquiry into SIDS research," says Dr. Rubens. "For the first time, it's now possible that with a simple, standard hearing test babies could be identified as at risk for SIDS, allowing preventative measures to be implemented in advance of a tragic event. ... We must now fully explore all aspects of inner ear function and SIDS, and analyze testing frequencies higher than those currently tested by newborn hearing screen centers."

## Protect Preteens with Three Recommended Vaccines

**As children approach their teen years**, parents often worry about how to protect them from new risks and potential dangers. Experts at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have launched a campaign to educate parents about one of the things they can do to protect their children beginning at 11 and 12 years of age: Make sure they get their vaccines.

The CDC's Preteen Vaccine campaign is designed to inform parents, caregivers, family physicians, and pediatricians about CDC's new vaccination recommendations for 11- and 12-year-olds. The three preteen vaccines include MCV4, which protects against meningitis and its complications; Tdap, which is a booster against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (whooping cough); and for girls, the vaccine for the human papillomavirus (HPV), which is a common cause of cervical cancer.

The Web site, [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/preteen](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/preteen), provides easy-to-understand, downloadable educational materials in English and Spanish for parents and health care providers about the vaccines and the diseases they prevent.

