

Policy Brief

Urgent Need for Legislation to Ban Water Beads



Kipley's Story

One year old Kipley was severely injured by water beads. In April of 2017 water beads were purchased online for Kipley's older sister Abigail's sixth birthday. The beads arrived without a warning label or directions. Kipley's parents provided diligent supervision while Abigail played, did not allow Kipley to play with the beads, maintained separate play areas, and cleaned up after use. Unbeknownst to the family, Kipley somehow found and ingested a water bead, which formed a blockage in her small intestine. The water bead material was inside Kipley's gastrointestinal tract for approximately 70 days before it was discovered and removed during emergency exploratory surgery in July.

Having triumphed through a major surgery, Kipley's family felt an overwhelming sense of relief as they brought her back home. Despite their best efforts to resume a normal life, a subtle but unsettling shift began to unfold. Kipley's coordination slipped away; she was floppier and weaker. She stopped signing, talking, and consistently answering to her name. Desperate for answers, Kipley's family turned to her pediatrician, only to have their concerns brushed aside time and again. Kipley's parents persisted and her pediatrician begrudgingly put in referrals. Early Intervention evaluated Kipley in September of 2017. The evaluation specialists informed the family that their concerns for Kipley were valid; she was experiencing new delays in her development. In October of 2017, Kipley was diagnosed with a brain injury, Toxic Brain Encephalopathy, due to chemical exposure from the water beads.

Kipley is now 7 years old. Her water bead injury impacted the trajectory of her life. Kipley's dream is to "keep friends safe" from water beads. In order to prevent water bead injuries caregivers and healthcare providers must understand their risks. Ceasing the sale and marketing of water beads as toys is crucial to ensuring these dangerous beads are kept out of homes, schools, and therapy clinics entirely.



Water beads have been shown to cause severe injuries to children:

- Dermatitis Rash
- Nasal Cavity Injury
- Hearing Loss
- Lung Injury
- Intestinal Obstruction
- Bowel Perforation
- Infection
- Exposure to Toxic Chemicals
- Brain Injury
- Toxic Encephalopathy
- Seizure
- Sepsis
- Septic Shock
- Asphyxiation
- Death

That Water Bead Lady



Stats you should know...

- Water beads are made from super absorbent polymer chemicals that can grow 1,500 times their size when placed in liquid
- Water beads absorb fluids and can expand within the body
- This has lead to multiple cases of life-threatening blockages, requiring surgery, and even death
- Water beads are not always visible on diagnostic imaging, making them difficult for healthcare providers to diagnose
- Even with caregivers providing strict adult supervision, following product age recommendations, and directions many families do not realize a water bead has been ingested, inserted or inhaled
- Even after diligent cleaning a water bead may be missed, for a pet or small child to later find unbeknownst to caregivers.
- Water beads can bounce, spill, and roll outside of a designated play area and dry up to their original sprinkle size making them difficult to spot in carpet fibers, under furniture or toys, stuck in corners or even cracks in the floor
- Children ingest water beads because they look like candy, or insert them into their ears or nose out of curiosity
- Water beads are much more than just a choking hazard
- Water beads pose a public health risk, the public and healthcare providers must be informed of the dangers
- Presently, U.S. consumers injured by a Chinese-made product and unable bring a lawsuit against a responsible party in the U.S. will not be compensated for their injuries. In this regard, the American legal system has failed to adequately protect American consumers
- Most often the chemical content of toys is not readily available to consumers at the point of purchase, and physicians at point of care
- "Non-toxic" isn't a regulated term - there are concerns regarding the toxicity of water beads due to the chemical acrylamide
- Absent strict specifications about chemical content, there also may be batch to batch variation in chemical mixtures used for toys. The chemicals used in toys may change rapidly in response to market forces, or may be protected as proprietary information. The chemicals used in toys made by smaller manufacturers, may be less well controlled and/or undocumented
- The last voluntary recall of a water bead product occurred in 2012
- The Consumer Product Safety Commission is unable to unilaterally force a recall; cooperation from companies or litigation is required
- Despite growing cases of injuries and even fatalities, the CPSC has been unable to gain cooperation from companies in order to issue voluntary recalls on newer water bead toys
- In the United States, there have been at least 248 known water bead cases as reported to the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS) from January 1, 2017 to November 22, 2022. Of the 248 NEISS incident reports related to water beads: 112 were involved in ingestion, 100 involved ear canal insertion, 35 involved nasal cavity insertion and 1 involved eye injury
- The NEISS-reported incidents produce a national estimate for the period 2017-2021 of 4,500 emergency department visits associated with water beads
- Water beads have been banned in multiple counties

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