

Water-Absorbing Polymer Bead Safety

By: Mingyi Zhang, Student Pharmacist
University of Minnesota, College of Pharmacy

Water beads, also known as water-absorbing polymer beads, might seem like fun and harmless little balls, but they can be quite dangerous if swallowed. These small, colorful spheres are designed to absorb water and can expand significantly in size. Some can grow to the size of a tennis ball! While they have various practical uses, such as toys or in gardening, they can pose risks when misused or mishandled.

One danger of water beads is they may expand inside the body, causing stomach discomfort or intestine blockages. In addition, they can be a choking hazard when fully expanded. Since they are small and look appealing, small children and animals may even put them in their ears or up their nose, causing blockage and internal damage.

Warning signs your child may have ingested water beads:

- Refusing to eat
- Lethargy
- Drooling
- Vomiting
- Wheezing
- Abdominal pain
- Constipation
- Abdominal swelling and soreness
- Complaints that something is stuck in the throat or chest



While water beads can be entertaining and useful when used according to directions, it's important to keep them away from young children and pets, and to dispose of them properly to avoid choking hazards and health risks. Always follow safety guidelines and be mindful of the potential dangers associated with these tiny but absorbent beads.

Safety tips for water beads:

- Don't let children play with water beads unsupervised.
- Store water beads in a tightly sealed container and out of the reach of young children.
- After playing with the water beads, be sure to sweep or vacuum the area since these water beads can be small and hard to see.

If you think someone may have ingested water beads, or placed them in their nose or ears, call the Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 immediately.

Upcoming Events

- 2/10/24: Youth with Stethoscopes event
- March 17-23, 2024: National Poison Prevention Week



Did You Know?

- Poison Centers are not just for children. We help everyone!
- We have poison information providers and pharmacists who answer the Poison Help line to provide you with expert advice.
- When you call Poison Help at 1-800-222-1222, there is no cost!
- We keep your information confidential just like at the hospital or clinic.