Laundry detergent pods implicated in many child poisoning cases and one death, study found

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(dailyRx News) Laundry detergent pods may be convenient, but they may also pose the threat of poisoning to children.

A new study looked at poisonings from laundry detergent pods — small packets of liquid or powdered detergent. They found that many children had been poisoned from ingesting the pods, and one had died.

The study authors said the pods, which are often brightly colored, can look like candy to children. They recommended that parents of small children use traditional detergents, which are much less concentrated than laundry pods.

"After this study was published, I have been recommending that traditional detergent be used rather than laundry detergent pods for households with children under 4," said Robert Kotas, MD, a board-certified pediatrician who practices at Baylor Pediatric and Adolescent Associates in Murphy, Texas.

Laundry detergent pods are a relatively new product that began appearing on the market in 2010, the study authors wrote. The pods contain concentrated laundry chemicals in powder or liquid form.

To a child younger than 3, the colored packets may look appealing, like candy, the study authors wrote. Small children often put things in their mouths — they may use taste as a way to learn about their surroundings. The pods can break and spill chemicals, which the child may swallow, rub in his or her eyes or inhale.

"These detergent pods are more toxic and dangerous than regular powder detergent. Chemicals found in the pods such as propylene glycol have been postulated to cause increased symptoms," Dr. Kotas said.

"Most of these products are brightly colored and attract children. If parents decide to continue to use these products, they should buy pods with opaque packaging, and store them in a high place away from children. Forty-two percent of the ingestions occurred in households that had easy access for the children. However, lapses occur even when parents store them correctly. In 10 percent of the ingestions, the pods were left open while the caregiver was momentarily distracted," he said.

A research team, led by Gary A. Smith, MD, DrPH, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital, used data from the National Poison Data System to study how many children had ingested laundry pods.

The researchers studied laundry detergent pod exposures from 2012 through 2013 in children younger than 6. They found that 17,230 children had been exposed to laundry detergent pods. In most cases, the child swallowed the detergent.

Almost 80 percent of the children swallowed the laundry pod or its contents. Other children inhaled the detergent or were exposed through a combination of swallowing and inhalation. Between March 2012 and April 2013, the monthly number of exposures increased more than 600 percent.

Children younger than 3 accounted for 73.4 percent of all exposures. Of the exposed children, 4.4 percent were hospitalized.

The children had minor, moderate or severe reactions to swallowing a laundry pod. Vomiting was the most common reaction among the cases studied, the researchers noted. Other reactions included eye pain, redness and irritation.

Dr. Smith and colleagues reported that 102 children needed to have a breathing tube placed to help them breathe after being exposed to the detergent. One child died after laundry pod exposure.

The research team noted that laundry pods pose a serious poisoning risk for young children. Most manufacturers package laundry pods in see-through containers that children can open easily.

"It is not clear that any laundry detergent pods currently available are truly child resistant; a national safety standard is needed to make sure that all pod makers adopt safer packaging and labeling," Dr. Smith said in a press release. "Parents of young children should use traditional detergent instead of detergent pods."

Detergents and similar substances should be stored out of reach of children in locked cabinets.

If a child ingests one of these laundry detergent pods, the first thing parents should do, Dr. Kotas said, is call the Poison Center Network.

"There is no cost to the patient, and the poison centers are trained to advise and monitor children that have been exposed," he said.

"The symptoms are variable and range between mild and severe. Ingestion, inhalation and eye injuries were common in this study. If an eye injury occurs, rinsing the eyes with water can help. If there are any systemic symptoms such as vomiting, lethargy or difficulty breathing, emergency medical services should be activated immediately," he explained.

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