
ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE



Children and the dangers of magnet ingestion

Tuesday 7 May, 2013

While the ingestion of foreign bodies by children and adolescents is generally harmless, the ingestion of magnets can cause serious gastrointestinal problems, delegates to the 82nd Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons have been told.

Dr Brooke Rule, a Registrar in the Intensive Care Unit of Royal Perth Hospital, based her findings on a review of all presentations to the Emergency Department of the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children between June 2007 and November 2012.

“There was a total of 30 patients who had ingested either single or multiple magnets,” Dr Rule said.

“When multiple magnets are ingested they can be attracted to each other across the bowel wall, which may lead to pressure necrosis, perforation, fistula formation and/or intestinal obstruction. Even single large magnets can cause problems such as obstruction.

“Of the series of cases we reviewed, one child sustained multiple perforations, another had a single perforation, three were diagnosed with impending perforations (one in multiple areas, the other two in a single area), and a further child had a large round magnet obstructing his pylorus.”

As part of her presentation Dr Rule proposed an algorithm for the investigation and management of magnet ingestions.

She said, however, prevention remains better than cure.

“We recommend more measures be taken to increase public and clinician awareness of the dangers of magnet ingestion, along with a review of all regulations pertaining to the use of magnets in toys for children.”

Approximately 1200 surgeons from New Zealand, Australia and around the world are attending the ASC, which runs from 6 to 10 May and is being held at Auckland’s Skycity/Crowne Plaza Convention Centre.

**Media inquiries: Michael Barrett, Manager Media & Public Relations
+64 211 187 670**

**Bridget Hooper, Media & Public Relations Officer
+64 211 187 625**