

Poison Prevention Press

July/August 2023

Volume 16, Issue 4

Safety Tips for Water Beads

We recommend the following safety tips:

- Supervise children when using water beads
- Do not let children under the age of 4 play with, or be around, water beads
- Store dry water beads up, away, and out of sight when not being used
- Read the directions for use before using water beads
- Have a conversation with children who will be using water beads and stress the importance of not eating the water beads
- Encourage older children to tell an adult if a younger child eats a water bead

Did you know that...

- There are 43 cases of SBO that have been published in research since 2011?
- There have been two deaths linked to water bead ingestion complications?

Follow the MPC on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#)

The Facts About Water Beads

Water beads have many uses and come in a variety of different forms, with the most popular branded toy product for children being Orbeez®. They look like candy, which may cause children to ingest them. If ingested, they can cause physical harm and have the potential of causing a severe, and sometimes deadly, small bowel obstruction (SBO) in children.

Water bead ingestions in children are increasingly being reported to Poison Centers. Most often, these cases are related to toys. A review of published research provides lessons in the danger of water beads.

Risk Factors of Water Beads

Children under the age of 4 are most at risk, and ingesting a dry water bead is more of a risk than ingesting a wet water bead. Dry water beads can grow to at least 1 inch in diameter after being soaked in any liquid! Even a 1 inch water bead can cause an SBO.

Water beads that are ingested while dry are more of a risk due to their ability to pass through the stomach and expand in the small intestine, causing an SBO. A fully hydrated bead would typically be unable to pass out of the stomach into the small intestine, reducing the risk of SBO.

At this time, the number of beads ingested has not yet been determined to be a risk factor. This is due to their inability to bind together and form a large obstruction that could potentially put the patient at higher risk for SBO.

Symptoms of SBO from Water Beads

Research shows that SBOs most often occur in children younger than 4 years. Symptoms of obstruction most often began one day after ingestion. Symptoms that children experienced include:

- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Stomach Pain
- Vomiting

Seizures are possible, but not common. They likely occurred because the SBO caused repeated vomiting, leading to very low levels of sodium in their blood.

It is very important to go to a health care provider immediately if symptoms occur, as SBOs can be fatal.

Removing Water Beads Causing SBO

Water beads causing an SBO were removed by either an endoscopy (insertion of a tube with a camera down the throat) or surgery. A few children required a bowel resection (surgery to remove part of the small and/or large intestine) due to necrosis (death of cells or tissue) from the SBO.

During these medical procedures, most often one water bead was removed that was anywhere from 1-2.5 inches in size. The two deaths linked to water bead ingestion complications had delays of more than one week before being seen by a health care provider.

As always, the Maryland Poison Center is available 24/7. If you think your child has swallowed a water bead, call 1-800-222-1222 right away.