MEDIA RELEASE

Surgeons say stay alert to the festive fears

Tuesday 27th December, 2016

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) takes this opportunity to remind all Australians of some of the unseen dangers we face during the festive season, and how to spot them.

RACS has already urged motorists to use caution and restraint on our roads over the holiday period in regard to speed, alcohol and road safety, in what is traditionally a busy time for emergency departments across the country.

The festive season is also traditionally a time of gift-giving and many gifts involve small batteries.

Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) surgeons are warning parents and child caregivers to be aware of the serious internal injuries and even death that could result from small children swallowing button batteries.

Head of ENT Surgery at Sydney's Westmead Children's Hospital, and Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Dr John Curotta, warns of the potential hazards of these batteries, particularly with new toys and devices given as Christmas gifts.

"If a child swallows a button battery it is an emergency, and that child must receive immediate medical attention," Dr Curotta said.

“If a child displays an unexplained sudden onset of drooling, painful swallowing, or is unable to swallow food but is able to swallow liquids, it is possible that a foreign object may be present in the airway. Even if you have not seen it, there is a chance they may have swallowed a button battery”, he said.

Another potential hazard if swallowed is the new craze of water-absorbing beads. There were two reported incidents this year of children swallowing these beads. They can expand to 400 times their original size and are often used by florists, but are also now components in toys that look like miniature fish, crabs, frogs, dinosaurs and even fairies, which are sold for kids to add water and watch them grow.

Trampolines are also popular Christmas gifts and although many have transitioned from spring-edge models to those with safety nets, trampoline accidents are still prevalent.

Dr Alison Wray, a paediatric neurosurgeon at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital said accidents are more likely to occur if more than one child is jumping at the same time or if the safety net zipper has not been secured.

"Just because there are safety nets around the trampoline, this doesn't mean that the situation is as safe as it could be," Dr Wray said.

RACS also reminds people to be mindful of open flames especially from candles and to always know where the fire extinguisher is because burns can be serious especially when young children are involved.

Always keep a first aid kit on hand in your home and in your vehicle. No matter the injury, the kit will provide you with the basics you will need to manage the accident and treat the injury. Dial 000 for an emergency.

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons wishes everyone a safe and happy holiday season this year.

About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.

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