



Water Beads & Bowel Obstruction

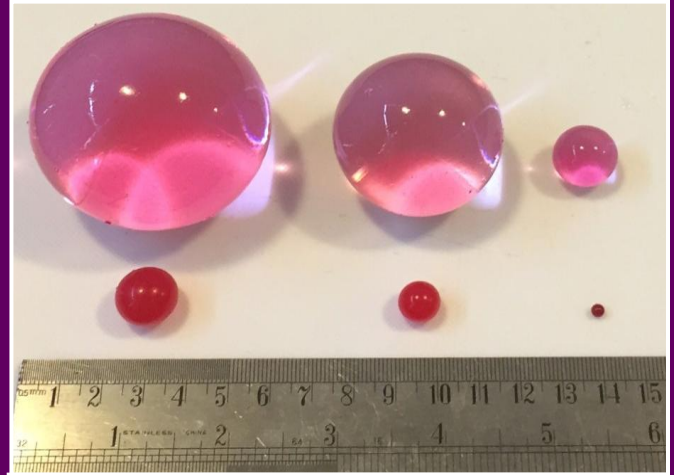


Image Source:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.5694/mja16.00936>

Water beads have been linked to child deaths overseas and to serious harm to children in the UK.

- Water beads are the common name for superabsorbent polymers (SAPs). When exposed to liquid, they expand. They start small, only a few millimetres, but can expand to over 400 times that size in around 36 hours.
- They are marketed as toys, sensory kits, art kits, hydro guns, stress balls, home decor or vase fillers.
- Dehydrated beads, when swallowed, expand in the GI tract. They can cause obstruction and require surgical removal.
- Symptoms may develop hours or even a day or more after swallowing a bead.
- Inhaled beads require urgent removal.
- Water beads are not visible on X rays.
- If the ingested object is unknown, and there is potential for **button or coin batteries**, **magnets**, or sharp objects, then X rays are indicated.
- **Ask parents/carers of young children and children/adults with a learning disability, presenting with GI symptoms, about possible access to water beads, batteries and magnets.**

Product Safety Alert: Water Beads (PSA7) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Bowel obstruction following ingestion of superabsorbent polymers beads: literature review - PubMed (nih.gov)

For Safety Alerts and RCEM issued Safety Flashes see:

<https://rcem.ac.uk/safety-3/>