

Liquid detergent capsules a danger to kids' eyes

REUTERS, New York

During a six-month period, doctors treated six cases of severe eye injuries in young children caused by their squeezing capsules containing liquid washing detergent, according to a report released Thursday.

"Kids may instinctively grasp and squeeze these gel-liquid tablets, which can burst relatively easily in the hand, and thus splash the caustic contents in the eyes," study author Dr. Noel Horgan of the Children's University Hospital in Dublin, Ireland, told Reuters Health.

To keep kids safe from detergent, parents need to take extra precautions, Horgan added. "These products should be stored in cupboards out of children's reach," he said.

The researcher explained that the children experienced alkali eye injuries, considered to be the most severe form of chemical eye injury.

Thankfully, all of the children included in the report received prompt treatment -- eye irrigation, anesthetic drops, antibiotics, and steroids to reduce inflammation -- so they eventually left the hospital with healed eyes and normal vision, Horgan said.

As Horgan and his team report in the medical journal The Lancet, the children ranged in age from 18 months to 3 years old. All experienced eye injuries after playing with gel-capsules of washing detergent, designed to go directly into the washing machine.

The tablets can burst when they are squeezed hard, the authors note, and may burst more easily when in contact with water.

Horgan explained that alkali eye injuries occur when an alkaline substance -- such as detergent or lime in plaster or cement -- comes in contact with the eye, damaging the stem cells at the edge of the cornea.

"This is significant in that these stem cells provide new cells to line the surface of the cornea - i.e., 'epithelial' cells - and a healthy corneal epithelium is essential for corneal clarity and normal vision," he said,

Consequently, in severe cases, stem cells can be permanently damaged, permanently affecting vision.

Along with keeping tablets out of reach of children, Horgan also recommended that manufacturers make warning labels more prominent, and design packages to be childproof.