



French Directorate General for Health

Paris, 26 December 2019

Press release

Water beads: hazardous to children in the event of ingestion!

The French authorities are alerting parents and carers to the risk of water-absorbing gel beads being ingested by children, particularly the under-fives. These accidents can have serious and sometimes fatal consequences.

Water beads are designed to absorb up to 400 times their weight in water. Translucent and brightly coloured, they are used for decorative purposes, generally as vase fillers for cut flowers. Great care must be taken to keep the beads well out of reach when supervising young children.

Several serious ingestion accidents have been reported, including one recent fatality, primarily involving children under five. The Directorate General for Health (DGS), the Directorate General for Competition, Consumer Affairs and Fraud Control (DGCCRF) and the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety (ANSES) are working with professionals in the sectors involved to improve the safety of these products and prevent accidents of this type.

Ingesting water beads is extremely dangerous for children, particularly if the beads are not fully rehydrated.

What are the risks? The beads can continue to expand considerably for several hours after ingestion, causing bowel obstructions. In the most serious cases, these accidents require major surgery and, without prompt action, they can sometimes be fatal. Like all small objects, the beads are also a choking hazard.

What is the best way to prevent ingestion?

Children can mistake water beads for sweets and swallow them so it is important to keep them out of reach at all times.

What should you do in the event of ingestion or suspected ingestion?

Contact a Poison Control Centre immediately for advice on what to do.

The authorities are also alerting consumers to the existence of retailers who may be selling or promoting water beads as “playthings”, particularly online. **Despite their engaging appearance, water beads are neither sweets nor toys, even though some online retailers may choose to present them as such!**

Moreover, if non-compliant and hazardous water beads were to be identified as toy accessories, they would be withdrawn/recalled by the DGCCRF.

In practice

To find the nearest Poison Control Centre: <http://www.centres-antipoison.net/>
In the event of an emergency, dial 15 (in France) or 112.

Press liaison:

DGS: presse-dgs@sante.gouv.fr - Tel.: +33 (0)1 40 56 84 00 - @AlerteSanitaire

DGCCRF: communication@dgccrf.finances.gouv.fr - Tel.: +33 (0)1 44 97 23 91

ANSES: presse@anses.fr - Tel.: +33 (0)1 49 77 22 26 / 13 77 - @Anses_fr