



Pathology/Biology Section - 2013

G169 “The Killer B’s” – A Case Series of Consumer Product Related Deaths in Young Children

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better awareness of consumer product related deaths in young children.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting a case series of autopsy findings and circumstances related to consumer product deaths in young children (five-years-of-age) over the past 20 years (1992 – 2012) at the Denver Office of the Medical Examiner.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that nearly 30,000 deaths in the United States are related to consumer products annually. In 2010, there were an estimated 181,500 toy-related injuries and 17 toy-related deaths in children less than 15-years-of-age. Between 2006 – 2008, there were an estimated 101 nursery product related deaths annually in children less than five years of age.

The CPSC is responsible for protecting the public from serious injury or death from more than 15,000 types of consumer products sold in the United States. The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008 was established with the intent of providing stringent oversight on product manufacturing and testing requirements, penalties for violations, whistleblower protections, and a database for product information and consumer reporting. Despite improvements in federal agency oversight, a significant number of deaths are still attributable to faulty or misused consumer products. The majority of these deaths will be, or should be, investigated by Coroner or Medical Examiner Offices.

Presented is a number of selected cases between 1992 and 2012 where the death of a young child (<5 years of age) was associated with a consumer product. The cases include: (1) a 6-month-old infant male who drowned when his Bumbo baby seat tipped over in an adult bathtub. The Bumbo baby seat was first recalled in 2007, and since then, the CPSC has learned of at least 50 incidents in which babies have fallen from Bumbo seats while they were being used on raised surfaces. In all, there have been over 20 reports of skull fractures to infants using the Bumbo baby seat. This has led to a second recent recall of the baby seat in August 2012; (2) a 3-month-old infant girl who drowned when her baby bathtub flipped over in an adult bathtub; (3) a 4-month-old infant male who aspirated a party balloon. According to the CPSC, balloons are the leading cause of asphyxial related deaths in young children. Accidents involving balloons tend to occur in two ways: some children have sucked uninflated balloons into their mouths, often while attempting to inflate them. Some deaths may have resulted when children swallow uninflated balloons they are sucking or chewing on; (4) an 8-month-old male who suffocated in a beanbag chair; (5) a 4 month-old-male wrapped in a “swaddling” blanket who smothered to death; and, 6) a 17-month-old infant male who strangulated to death while playing with a bead maze toy box.

The forensic community has the opportunity to take an active role in protecting the public from consumer product related injuries and deaths through proper reporting, documentation, and public awareness of tragic events resulting from unsafe or misused products.

Consumer Product, Childhood Deaths, Accidental Deaths