While the number of children poisoned by laundry detergent pods has decreased slightly in recent years, they still pose a serious risk to young children, according to a new study.

From January 2012 to December 2017, there were nearly 73,000 calls to U.S. poison-control centers about exposure to single-use liquid laundry detergent packets, or pods, according to the study published recently in the journal Pediatrics.

The Center for Injury Research and Policy and the Central Ohio Poison Center, which are part of Nationwide Children’s Hospital, studied exposure to the laundry pods in those five years. Most of the cases involved children younger than 6 years old.

Henry Spiller, director of the Central Ohio Poison Center at Nationwide Children’s Hospital and co-author of the study, said the number of people being exposed to laundry detergent packets was doubling every year.

Then in 2015, the leading laundry pod manufacturers changed the design to make it harder for children to access the colorful, squishy pods. Child safety groups, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, began campaigns to increase awareness about the pods’ hazards. Since then, cases of poisoning have dropped 18%.

In central Ohio, there were 53 reports of exposure to detergent packets in 2012, 320 reports in 2015 and 268 in 2018. Those numbers include people of all ages. “We are seeing a decrease,” Spiller said. “The one concern is that we are still seeing these, though.”

The study also showed some cases of adults, particularly those with dementia or developmental disabilities, being poisoned by liquid laundry detergent packets.

The detergent packets, which were first sold in the United States in 2012, attract children because the colorful pods look like candy, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Laundry detergent packets can be punctured and cause chemical burns to skin, eyes or be ingested. Liquid laundry detergent packets are more dangerous than traditional liquid or powder detergent, but researchers aren’t sure why.

Spiller recommends using liquid or powder detergents if you have children under 6 years old or keeping the laundry detergent packets out of reach of children.

He said the industry will continue to work with health care providers, pediatricians and news media to educate people on the harm laundry detergent packets can cause and how the packets are different than other laundry detergents.

“We don’t want the message to be ‘Hey the problem is fixed,’” Spiller said. “We want parents to know these are dangerous if you have them in your house.”

Pod poisonings

Laundry packets still harmful to children

By ELLEN WAGNER
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