

## **Risk of suffocation through hard sugar balls with chewing gum core**

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For a few years, hard sugar balls almost the size of tennis balls have been stocked on the confectionary shelves of retailers. They consist of rock-hard sugar layers which only become smaller slowly through licking and a soft chewing gum core. The Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) has assessed whether the sweet product poses an acute health hazard on account of its size and hard consistence.

The hard sugar balls, which are known as jawbreakers in the USA, have an original size of about 5 cm for most manufacturers. This means that the ball too big for children to be able to take it in their mouth in its entirety. However, a life-threatening situation could arise, if the candy ball has become so small through licking that the child can put the remainder in its mouth. If, under unfortunate circumstances, the hard sugar ball inadvertently gets into the child's throat – and this is certainly possible when children are playing and not focusing on their sucking – it can narrow the respiratory passages or block them completely. An analysis conducted by the BfR of cases of suffocation in children with ball-shaped objects such as toys shows that the critical size for school children is about 4 cm in diameter. At 4 cm, the hard sugar ball is still too large to be swallowed. A life-threatening situation could arise in which the hard sugar ball must be removed within just a few minutes in order to prevent death from suffocation.

Different descriptions of cases from the USA show that such hard sugar balls did in some cases enter the throat of children and the children were only saved by applying the Heimlich manoeuvre. In this procedure, a special grip is used to remove objects on which someone is choking by creating excess pressure from the respiratory passages. The BfR has not to date received any reports on such accidents in Germany.

The probability of such an accident happening is presumably very low. Nevertheless, the BfR is of the opinion that food, especially food for children and adolescents, should not pose a risk with life-threatening consequences and that such risks should be eliminated to the greatest possible extent.

The full version of this BfR Opinion is available in German on [http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/343/erstickungsgefahr\\_durch\\_hartzucker\\_baelle\\_mit\\_kaugummikern.pdf](http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/343/erstickungsgefahr_durch_hartzucker_baelle_mit_kaugummikern.pdf)