



Early Years Inspectorate

Regulatory Notice

QMS reference	EYI-RN12.4
Version	V1.0
Issued:	February 2024
Title:	Use of Water Beads in Early Years Services
Ref:	10/2024

1.0 Context

Water Beads, also called sensory beads, are sometimes used as play tools for children. When the small, hard plastic balls are placed in water, they can expand significantly.

In 2023, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) carried out a water beads project primarily focused on online offerings of the product. The CCPC found a large number of water bead products for sale on the marketplace which lacked, or had an incorrect, age appropriateness warning highlighted at point of purchase and also a number of products purchased had either no, or incorrect, labelling. Concerningly, some products while designed for DIY/Home Décor use, were also inappropriately targeting young children. The CCPC secured corrective action in each of the non-compliant products found.

In August 2023 the CCPC published [an educational/advisory note on its website](#) to alert consumers to the risks involved with water beads along with the issuing of a Press Release and [accompanying video](#).

The following guidance is available on the website.

“Water beads are a choking hazard for young children. If swallowed, the beads can continue to expand, growing considerably larger than their original size and causing intestinal blockages requiring medical intervention. The beads also can become lodged in a child’s ears or nose. There have been a number of reported incidents around the world involving water beads, including blockages in ear canals and internal organs resulting in hearing loss and bowel obstruction.” (CCPC, Aug 2023 [online] <https://www.ccpc.ie/consumers/2023/08/28/ccpc-issues-child-safety-warning-about-water-beads/>)

2.0 Decision of the Early Years Inspectorate

In response to the guidance issued by the CCPC the following decisions have been made

- 1. Water beads are prohibited for use in Pre-School and School Age Services for children aged under 5 years old.**
- 2. For children aged 5 years old and over, the service needs to ensure water beads are safely stored and should pre-school children attend the service, then controls need to be in place to ensure they cannot access them.**

A risk assessment will also be required for circumstances where pre-school children are attending a (Combined) School Age Service.