

Department of Surgery
2026 Research Day
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Title:

The Point of the Matter: An Analysis of Pediatric Emergency Department Encounters with Food-Handling Utensils

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Background:

Food-handling utensils, such as chopsticks, toothpicks, skewers, and forks, are routinely used in households and restaurants. These tools pose a risk of injury due to their hard, sharp ends that can result in ingestion, lacerations, or punctures.

Methods:

NEISS is a stratified probability sample of U.S. hospitals with emergency departments, including a pediatric stratum. Reported product-associated cases were used to create national estimates. NEISS (2005–2024) was queried for patients ≤17 years with injuries attributed to skewers, toothpicks/hors d'oeuvre picks, kitchen gadgets not elsewhere classified, and flatware excluding knives. Unrelated products, incomplete records, and adults (>17 years) were excluded.

Results:

There were 8,787 reported cases (172 chopsticks, 1,782 toothpicks, 169 skewers, and 1,052 forks) for an estimated total of 233,190 injuries. Ingestion accounted for 34.7% (n=3051). Others included laceration (n=1830), foreign body (n=1394), contusion/abrasion (n=687), and puncture (n=609). The most frequent sites injured were internal (n=3170), foot (n=1319), and finger (n=1007). The majority of cases (91.2%, n=8012) were treated and released; 548 were admitted; 105 left without being seen; 85 transferred; and 37 were held for observation.

Conclusions:

Food-handling utensils are common household items but can cause significant pediatric injuries. Most cases were treated and released, though some required transfer, largely for ingestion. These injuries are preventable through increased supervision and product safety design.