

Diagnosis and Treatment Strategies for Pediatric Urogenital Tract Foreign Bodies: A Retrospective Study

chengpin tao

Anhui Provincial Children's Hospital Hefei City

Bo Peng

Anhui Provincial Children's Hospital Hefei City

Changkun Mao

Anhui Provincial Children's Hospital Hefei City

Xin Yu

Anhui Provincial Children's Hospital Hefei City

Yongsheng Cao

caoyongsheng5@163.com


Anhui Provincial Children's Hospital Hefei City

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Abstract

Background: Foreign bodies in the pediatric urogenital tract are rare but urgent clinical conditions that can cause severe symptoms and complications. The current management remains challenging.

Objective: This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the clinical characteristics, diagnostic challenges, and treatment strategies for pediatric urogenital tract foreign bodies. Through a retrospective analysis of patient data, valuable insights into the management of this condition are offered to facilitate the development of more effective management strategies.

Methods: A single-center retrospective study design was employed, reviewing clinical data of 30 pediatric patients with urogenital tract foreign bodies admitted to Anhui Children's Hospital from October 2016 to May 2023. This included 16 cases of urethral and bladder foreign bodies and 14 cases of vaginal foreign bodies. Among them, there were 14 males and 16 females, with an average age of 7.4 years. Treatment methods included transvaginal endoscopic removal, cystoscopic removal, pneumovesicum laparoscopy removal, and perineal incisional foreign body removal. Surgical time, blood loss, hospitalization days, and postoperative follow-up results were recorded.

Results: Key clinical presentations included vaginal bleeding, abnormal vaginal discharge, hematuria, dysuria, urinary retention, and perineal pain. Preoperative routine examinations included ultrasound, abdominal radiography, and, in some cases, CT scans. All 30 patients underwent successful surgery, with an average surgical time of 39.6 ± 28.3 minutes, minimal intraoperative bleeding, and an average postoperative hospital stay of 2.8 ± 2.2 days. Follow-up from 3 months to 1 year revealed no abnormalities in the urogenital system, no residual foreign bodies, and no occurrence of severe complications. No cases of recurrent foreign body insertion were observed.

Conclusion: Early diagnosis and treatment of pediatric urogenital tract foreign bodies are crucial to reduce patient suffering and the risk of complications. The choice of surgical method depends on the type, size, and location of the foreign body, with endoscopy being the preferred option. Laparoscopic cystoscopy and open surgery are also effective treatment modalities. Strengthening supervision and education for children, guiding their curiosity correctly, can help prevent the occurrence of pediatric urogenital tract foreign bodies.

1. Introduction

Children's urogenital tract foreign bodies represent a relatively rare but urgent and challenging condition in clinical practice [1]. Children, driven by curiosity or accidents, may introduce foreign bodies into the urogenital tract [2]. Once these foreign bodies enter the urogenital tract, they can lead to urinary obstruction, infection, pain, vaginal bleeding, and long-term urogenital dysfunction [3–4]. Managing such cases requires special attention as it involves complex medical interventions and touches upon sensitive psychological and social aspects. While international research on adult urogenital tract foreign bodies is relatively extensive, studies specifically focusing on children are scarce [5–6]. Given the limitations in children's ability to articulate and their inherent shyness, the diagnosis and treatment of these cases may present additional challenges. Therefore, this study aims to concentrate on pediatric urogenital tract foreign bodies to enhance a systematic understanding of this issue and drive the development of more effective management strategies.

This study retrospectively analyzed clinical data from 30 pediatric patients with urogenital tract foreign bodies admitted to Anhui Children's Hospital between October 2016 and May 2023. It comprehensively summarized the clinical characteristics, diagnostic challenges, treatment strategies, and postoperative follow-up results of pediatric

urogenital tract foreign bodies. By providing valuable insights, the study aims to optimize the management of pediatric urogenital tract foreign bodies, reduce discomfort in affected children, prevent complications, and thereby enhance the overall quality of life and health status of these pediatric patients.

2. Clinical data and methods

2.1 Clinical data

This study employed a single-center retrospective research design. We reviewed case data of 30 pediatric patients with urogenital tract foreign bodies treated at Anhui Children's Hospital from October 2016 to May 2023. Detailed clinical data are presented in Table 1, including 16 cases of urethral and bladder foreign bodies and 14 cases of vaginal foreign bodies. Among them, there were 14 males and 16 females, with ages ranging from 1.5 to 13 years and a median age of 7.4 ± 3.9 years. Clinical manifestations of vaginal foreign bodies included vaginal bleeding, abnormal vaginal discharge, and lower abdominal pain, with a median age of 5.2 ± 1.9 years. Urethral and bladder foreign bodies presented with hematuria, urinary pain, difficulty urinating, and perineal pain, with a median age of 9.3 ± 4.2 years. The duration of foreign body placement ranged from the shortest at 8 hours to the longest at 1 year. The median duration for urethral and bladder foreign bodies was 3.2 ± 4.6 days, while for vaginal foreign bodies, it was 81.5 ± 107.7 days, with 4 cases having a placement time exceeding six months. The types of foreign bodies included needles, magnetic beads, thermometers, batteries, children's toys, hairpins, grains of rice, cotton fibers, toothpicks, springs, etc. Preoperative routine examinations included ultrasound and abdominal plain films (Figure 1-6), with additional CT (Figure 7-8) and MRI when necessary. Preoperative diagnoses through ultrasound were made in 18 cases, 14 cases through abdominal plain films, and 4 cases through CT. These detailed clinical data are further summarized in Table 2.

2.2 Therapeutic Approaches

Surgical Methods: All patients were planned for cystoscopy or vaginoscopy under general anesthesia. If the attempt to remove the foreign body via cystoscopy failed, pneumovesicum laparoscopy or open surgery was considered. **Pneumovesicum Laparoscopy Surgical Procedure:** A cystoscope was inserted through the urethra. Under cystoscopic guidance, four 2-0 absorbable sutures were used to suspend the top of the bladder. A small incision was made in the skin, and three trocars (two 5mm and one 3mm) were inserted under cystoscopic monitoring. CO₂ was insufflated into the bladder through the trocars to maintain pressure. A laparoscope and graspers were then introduced, and the foreign body was extracted through the 5mm trocar.

In our study, 14 cases with vaginal foreign bodies underwent transvaginal endoscopic removal. For urethral and bladder foreign bodies, 8 cases underwent cystoscopic removal, 2 cases underwent laparoscopic cystoscopic removal, 2 cases underwent perineal incisional foreign body removal, and 4 cases involved the foreign body protruding through the urethra, requiring perineal incisional foreign body removal.

Table 1
Detailed Clinical Data of Patients

NO	Sex	Age	location	Type	symptom	Length of stay (d)	operation method	Surgery duration	Post-op stay
1	M	2.2	Urethra	Needle	Pain	0.42	Cystoscope	73	4
2	M	11.7	Bladder	Magnetic bead	Hematuria	3	pneumovesicumr	48	3
3	M	6.1	Bladder	Thread knot	Hematuria	1	Cystoscope	41	1
4	F	1.5	Bladder	Rice grain	Parents found	1	Cystoscope	80	2
5	M	13.1	Urethra-Bladder	Thermometer	Dysuria	14	Open	29	7
6	M	13.1	Bladder	Wire	Hematuria	3	pneumovesicumr	25	7
7	M	12.6	Urethra	Toothpick	Pain	14	Open	59	3
8	M	11.8	Urethra	Needle	Pain	0.42	Cystoscope	125	2
9	M	12.2	Bladder	Magnetic bead	Dysuria	5	Cystoscope	61	2
10	M	12.2	Urethra	Magnetic bead	Dysuria	0.5	Cystoscope	21	3
11	M	6.4	Urethra	Needle	Pain	0.33	Open	7	2
12	F	2.4	Bladder	Rice grain	Pain	0.375	Cystoscope	40	2
13	M	11.7	Urethra	Magnetic bead	Painful hematuria	0.5	Cystoscope	43	1
14	M	11.0	Urethra	Needle	Pain	1	Open	17	2
15	M	12.4	Urethra-Bladder	Thermometer	Dysuria	0.42	Open	66	2
16	M	8.8	Urethra	Needle	Pain	7	Open	124	6
17	F	5.2	Vagina	Toy	Vaginal bleeding	2	Vaginoscope	42	2
18	F	2.8	Vagina	Sponge	Vaginal bleeding	15	Vaginoscope	11	3
19	F	3.9	Vagina	Cotton	Vaginal bleeding	30	Vaginoscope	14	1
20	F	10.2	Vagina	Hairpin, etc.	Vaginal discharge	180	Vaginoscope	30	2
21	F	5.0	Vagina	Cotton	Vaginal discharge	20	Vaginoscope	28	3

Note: Patient No. 20 had foreign objects including a metal hairpin, plastic pencil eraser, pebbles, and fruit peels. Patient No. 26 had foreign objects including a battery and a spring.

NO	Sex	Age	location	Type	symptom	Length of stay (d)	operation method	Surgery duration	Post-op stay
22	F	4.8	Vagina	Cotton	Vaginal discharge	10	Vaginoscope	15	3
23	F	7.1	Vagina	Toy	Vaginal bleeding	60	Vaginoscope	31	1
24	F	6.2	Vagina	Hairpin	Vaginal bleeding	180	Vaginoscope	16	2
25	F	3.2	Vagina	Glass ball	Parents found	1	Vaginoscope	15	3
26	F	3.7	Vagina	Battery, etc.	Pain	0.5	Vaginoscope	36	4
27	F	5.2	Vagina	Cotton ball	Vaginal discharge	90	Vaginoscope	19	1
28	F	4.8	Vagina	Toy	Vaginal discharge	180	Vaginoscope	37	2
29	F	3.4	Vagina	Battery	Pain	7	Vaginoscope	7	3
30	F	6.7	Vagina	Button	Vaginal bleeding	365	Vaginoscope	27	4
<p>Note: Patient No. 20 had foreign objects including a metal hairpin, plastic pencil eraser, pebbles, and fruit peels. Patient No. 26 had foreign objects including a battery and a spring.</p>									

Table 2. Summarized Clinical Data of Patients

Age, year , mean \pm SD	7.4 \pm 3.9
Gender	
Male	14 (46.7%)
female	16 (53.3%)
Location	
Urethra	8 (26.7%)
Bladder	6 (20%)
Urethra-Bladder	2 (6.7%)
Vagina	14 (46.7%)
Symptoms	
Hematuria	4(13.3%)
Pain	10(33.3%)
Dysuria	2(6.7%)
Colporrhagia	6(20%)
Vaginal fluid	5(16.7%)
Asymptomatic (parent found)	2(6.7%)
Type of FBs	
Sewing needle	5(16.7%)
Magnetic beads	4(13.3%)
Thermometer	2(6.7%)
Battery	2(6.7%)
small toy	3(10%)
hairclip	2(6.7%)
paddy	2(6.7%)
cotton fibre	3(10%)
Other	20(10%)

Note: Others include buttons, toothpicks, cotton balls, springs, glass balls, thread knots, sponges.

Figure 7: CT scan indicates a bladder foreign body resembling grains of rice.

3. Results

All 30 cases were successfully completed, with an average surgical duration of 39.6 ± 28.3 minutes and minimal intraoperative bleeding of 0.5 ± 0.7 ml. The average postoperative hospital stay was 2.8 ± 2.2 days, as detailed in Table 3. Urinary catheters were not retained for patients with vaginal foreign bodies, while for those with urethral and bladder foreign bodies, urinary catheters were retained postoperatively for an average duration of 8.0 ± 4.6 days. In endoscopic procedures, the catheter was removed within the first 1–7 days postoperatively, with an average duration of 4.6 ± 2.6 days. For perineal incisional procedures, the catheter was retained for 7–14 days postoperatively, averaging 9.3 ± 3.3 days. In laparoscopic cystoscopy procedures, the catheter was retained for an average of 12 days, and for perineal urethral incisional procedures, the catheter was retained for an average of 15 days. The duration of catheter retention depended on the location, shape, and surgical approach to the foreign body.

Postoperative follow-up was conducted from 3 months to 1 year, with an average follow-up duration of 7.8 months. Some patients experienced mild urinary tract infections in the early postoperative period, but symptoms were relieved after antibiotic treatment. Ultrasonography revealed no abnormalities in the urogenital system, and during

this period, no severe complications such as residual foreign bodies, urethral strictures, urethral or vaginal fistulas were observed. None of the patients experienced a recurrence of foreign body insertion.

Table 3. Surgical Outcomes.

Total operation time, min, mean \pm SD	39.6 \pm 28.3
Blood loss, mL, mean \pm SD	0.5 \pm 0.7
Postoperative hospital stay, days, mean \pm SD	2.8 \pm 2.2
Urinary Tract FB Remove drainage pipe, days, mean \pm SD	8.0 \pm 4.6
Postoperative follow-up period, month , mean \pm SD	7.8 \pm 3.0

4. Discussion

The occurrence of foreign bodies (FB) in the urogenital tract is indeed quite rare in clinical practice, especially in pediatric patients. FBs are more common in girls aged 4–9, while in boys, they are more prevalent in adolescents. FBs can consist of various substances such as magnetic beads, needles, hairpins, pencils, wires, button batteries, cotton swabs, etc. [7–9]. These FBs can be self-inserted, inserted by others, iatrogenic, migrated from adjacent organs, or a result of penetrating trauma [10–11]. In this study, all 30 cases involved self-inserted foreign bodies. The reasons for self-insertion differ significantly between adults and children. Adults may be influenced by sexual behavior, psychological disorders, self-harm, artistic expression, or substance abuse [12–13]. In pediatric cases, it is often due to curiosity, imitative behavior, play, emotional stress, self-exploration, or may indicate underlying mental health issues [14–15]. The insertion of foreign bodies into the urogenital tract, regardless of age, poses extremely high risks and can lead to significant physical injuries. If these foreign bodies remain in the body for an extended period, they may cause various serious complications [16]. Therefore, early diagnosis and treatment are crucial for patients with urogenital tract foreign bodies. Due to the diverse sizes, shapes, natures, and locations of urogenital tract foreign bodies, their clinical manifestations vary. Bladder foreign bodies typically result in spasmodic abdominal pain, hematuria, a sense of incomplete urination, and urinary interruption. Urethral foreign bodies are often accompanied by penile pain, urgency, dysuria, hematuria, and difficulty urinating [17–18]. Vaginal foreign bodies may cause increased abnormal genital secretions or genital bleeding, and studies suggest they are a rare cause of increased genital secretions and bleeding in pre-adolescent girls [19]. The prolonged presence of foreign bodies can lead to the formation of stones or the generation of granulation tissue around the foreign body, resulting in recurrent urogenital tract infections, fistula formation, and even sepsis [20].

When diagnosing foreign bodies (FB) in the urogenital tract, it is necessary to consider the patient's medical history, symptoms, clinical examinations, and imaging studies comprehensively. Sometimes, further specialized examinations may be required to ensure an accurate diagnosis. Young children, due to a lack of knowledge, fear, or embarrassment, often find it challenging to provide a clear history of foreign body implantation (FB), adding to the diagnostic difficulty [21]. When dealing with pediatric patients, it is especially important to use patient and sensitive communication methods to better understand their situations. Key information includes the nature, size, length, quantity, and time of insertion of the foreign body to facilitate better diagnosis and treatment [22]. Sharp or corrosive foreign bodies may cause mucosal rupture, leading to bleeding and painful symptoms, making early detection and diagnosis relatively easier. However, for some smaller, smooth, or disc-shaped foreign bodies, it may be challenging to cause noticeable symptoms in the early stages. Additionally, children may hide their medical

history due to shame, making early detection and diagnosis even more challenging. In our study, seven cases had foreign bodies for more than one month, four cases for over six months, with the longest duration being one year. Therefore, in such cases, doctors need to conduct a more careful assessment and inquiry, relying on detailed medical history collection and more sensitive clinical observation to ensure timely detection and management. The preferred diagnostic auxiliary examination is ultrasound (B-mode), which is a non-invasive, radiation-free, and cost-effective method, considered safe and comfortable for pediatric patients [23]. A study indicated that ultrasound examination has an overall sensitivity of 81% in diagnosing urogenital FB [24]. In the case of urogenital foreign bodies, ultrasound can provide information about the location, size, nature of the foreign body, and the presence of other abnormalities in the urogenital system [25]. Abdominal plain radiography is more intuitive for non-radio-opaque foreign bodies, allowing direct visualization of the shape and size of the foreign body. Its specificity for detecting abnormalities reaches up to 91% and is usually sufficient for locating and identifying metal and non-radio-opaque FB [24, 26]. However, abdominal plain radiography is unreliable for detecting radio-opaque FB and exposes children to radiation. Ultrasonography is highly useful in diagnosing radio-opaque substances [27]. In our study, 26 cases of foreign bodies were considered preoperatively through ultrasound and abdominal plain radiography, with a diagnostic rate of 86.7%. CT scans can provide better soft tissue images and higher diagnostic value when ultrasound and abdominal plain radiography cannot determine the presence or displacement of foreign bodies [28].

For children with a clinically confirmed diagnosis or a high suspicion of urogenital system foreign bodies, surgical treatment should be considered early after thorough preoperative preparation to minimize damage to the urogenital tract [12]. The clear goal of the surgery is to achieve the removal of foreign bodies (FBs) with minimal complications [14]. The treatment strategy for urogenital FBs depends on various factors, including the shape, nature, location, and size of the foreign body [29]. Specific methods include manual removal, endoscopic treatment, laparoscopic treatment, open surgery, etc. [30–31]. For small anterior urethral foreign bodies with smooth and blunt surfaces, lubricating the urethra with vaseline oil and pushing the foreign body towards the distal urethra with vascular forceps can be attempted. If unsuccessful, surgical treatment should be considered [32]. For foreign bodies in the posterior urethra, bladder, and vagina, endoscopic removal is usually the preferred treatment method [33–34]. Endoscopy has high value in both the diagnosis and treatment of FBs. This non-invasive surgical method, using cystoscopy or vaginoscopy, allows direct visualization of the foreign body and attempts to extract it with graspers [35]. Compared to open surgery, this endoscopic approach typically reduces patient discomfort, lowers the risk of postoperative complications, and shortens the recovery time. Due to the relatively narrow urethra in children, if the foreign body in the posterior urethra is large, it can be pushed into the bladder for removal [36]. When endoscopic treatment fails, open surgery is usually adopted, including suprapubic cystotomy for intravesical foreign bodies and external urethrotomy for foreign bodies lodged in the penile urethra. In our study, for larger FBs or those with significant adhesion to bladder tissues, we used pneumovesicum laparoscopy to extract the foreign bodies. This minimally invasive surgical approach is associated with less trauma, minimal bleeding, and faster recovery compared to traditional methods. We successfully applied this method in two cases in our study. In this research, two cases involved mercury thermometers, which were discovered during cystoscopy in the urethra-bladder region. Due to the risk of rupture, we did not push them into the bladder but instead used a perineal urethral incision to remove the thermometer. Additionally, four cases involved sewing needles, and cystoscopy revealed that the foreign bodies had penetrated the urethra and migrated towards the perineum. To safely extract these foreign bodies and avoid further damage to the urethra, we utilized a perineal small incision and successfully located and removed the needle tips. For urethral-bladder foreign bodies, especially sharp objects, entry into the urethra can cause urethral injury. To prevent and reduce the likelihood of urethral stricture, we extended the duration of

catheterization postoperatively. Especially in cases where partially sharp foreign bodies were found to have penetrated the urethra, causing urethral injury, we further prolonged the catheter retention time. Through postoperative follow-up, we have not observed the occurrence of urethral stricture, indicating that prolonging catheter retention time may help reduce the risk of postoperative urethral stricture. In comparison to the urethra, the vagina has a relatively short and wide anatomical structure, providing a broader space for endoscopic operations [37]. We chose to use a vaginoscopic foreign body forceps to successfully remove the 14 cases of vaginal foreign bodies in this study, and the entire process proceeded smoothly.

To prevent incidents of urogenital foreign bodies in children, caregivers can take the following preventive measures: Firstly, they should closely supervise children, especially young ones, and guide their curiosity correctly to prevent accidents. Secondly, caregivers should ensure that potentially dangerous items are stored out of reach of children. Additionally, educating children about body safety and knowledge of hazardous items is crucial. Finally, educating caregivers about the risks of urogenital foreign bodies in children and possible symptoms is essential so that they can take prompt action and seek medical help rather than attempting self-treatment.

This study has some limitations, including a single-center retrospective design and a relatively small sample size, which may not comprehensively represent the population of children with urogenital foreign bodies. Long-term follow-up data are limited and do not provide detailed information about the long-term health and complication development of patients. Despite these limitations, the study still provides valuable insights for healthcare professionals to enhance the diagnosis and treatment of urogenital foreign bodies in children, improving the quality of life for patients. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the sample size, delving into the characteristics and treatment outcomes of patients in different age groups, and conducting longer-term follow-ups for a more comprehensive understanding and management of this rare but significant clinical issue.

5. Conclusion

Although urogenital foreign bodies in children are uncommon, their potential for inaccurate historical information can lead to misdiagnosis, highlighting the critical importance of early and accurate diagnosis and treatment. Endoscopic removal of foreign bodies is an effective and safe treatment method, minimizing patient discomfort and reducing the risk of complications. In cases where endoscopic surgery fails, options such as laparoscopic removal of bladder foreign bodies or open incisional removal may be considered, depending on the nature and location of the foreign body. Educating parents and children to raise awareness of potential risks is also an effective preventive measure, contributing to a reduction in the incidence of urogenital foreign bodies.

Declarations

Data availability The datasets used and/or analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics approval This study was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Committee of Anhui Children's Hospital .

Ethics Accordance All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Consent to participate Informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians who were present during examination, history and sampling sessions.

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Figures

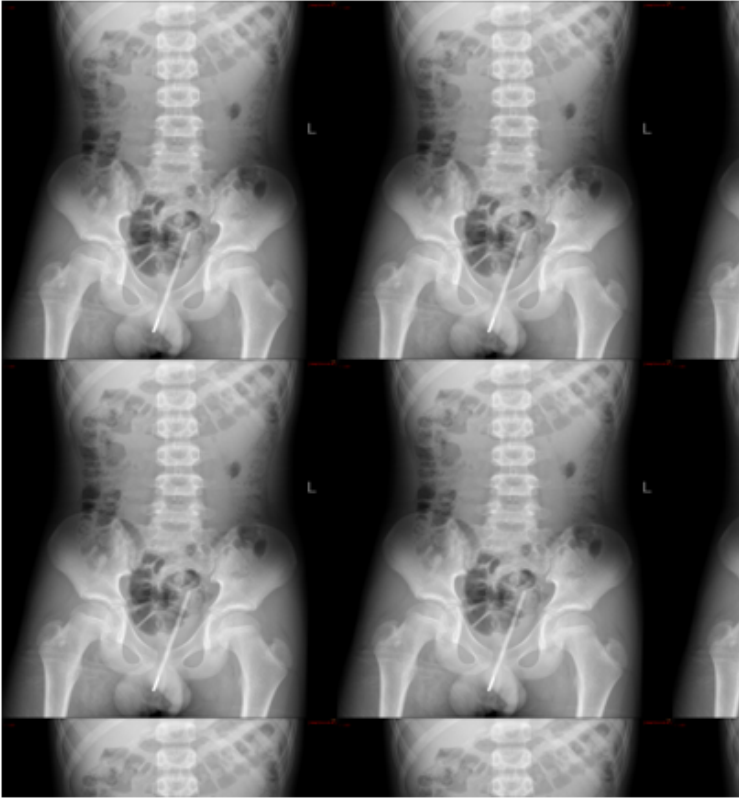


Figure 1

Abdominal X-ray indicates a urinary bladder foreign body, which is a thermometer.

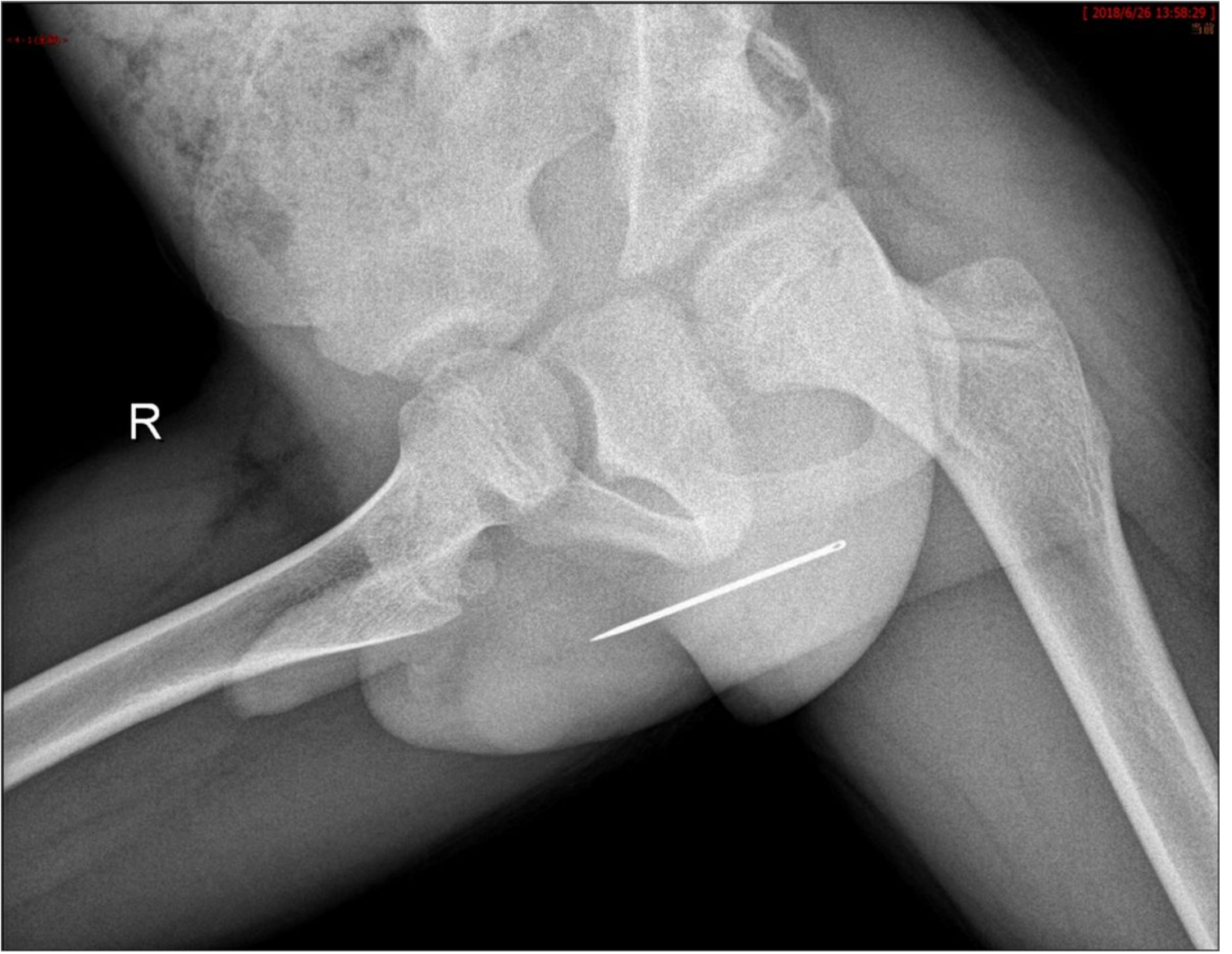


Figure 2

Abdominal X-ray suggests a urinary bladder foreign body, which is a needle.



Figure 3

Abdominal X-ray suggests a urinary bladder foreign body, which is a wire.

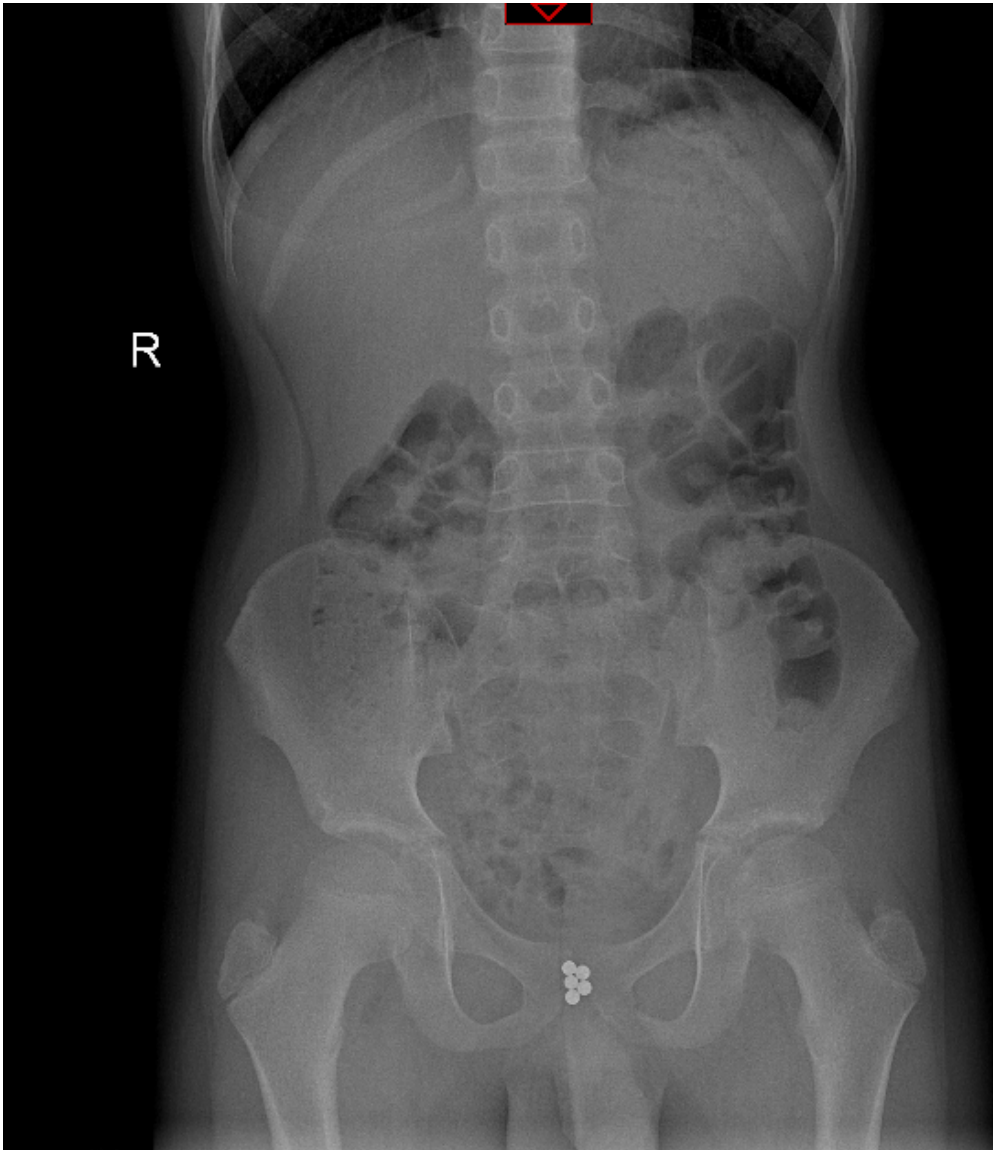


Figure 4

Abdominal X-ray suggests a bladder foreign body, which is a magnetic bead.

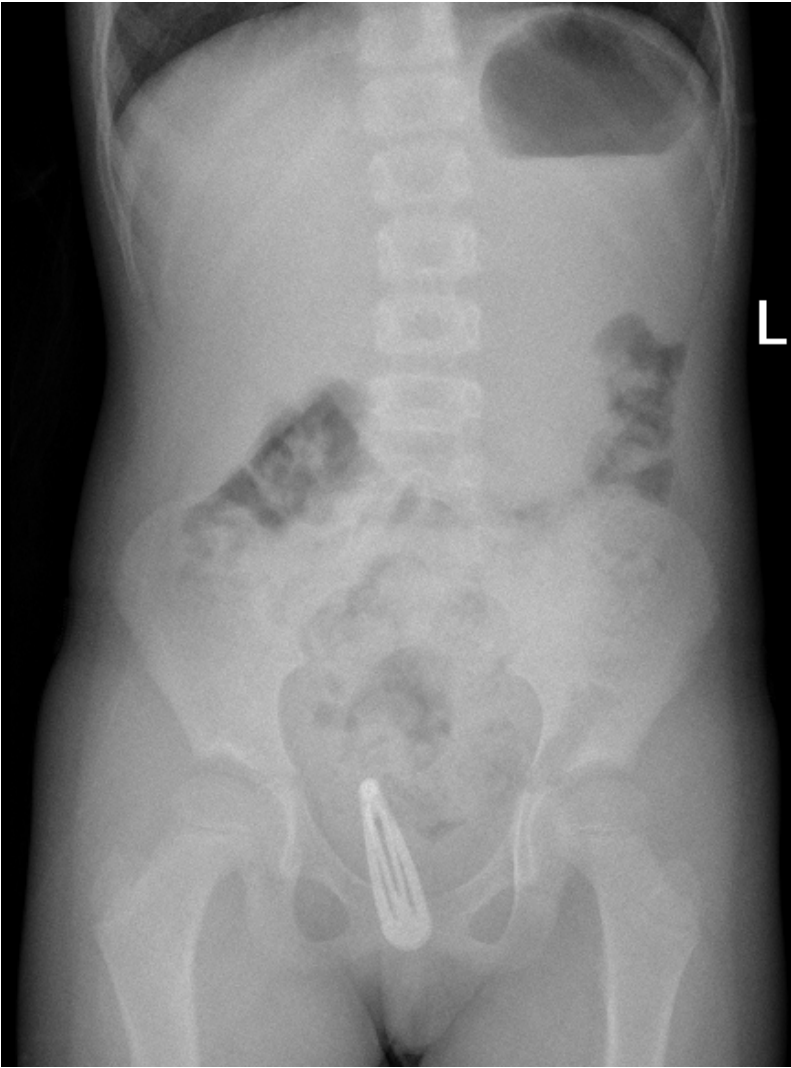


Figure 5

Abdominal X-ray suggests a vaginal foreign body, which is a hairpin.

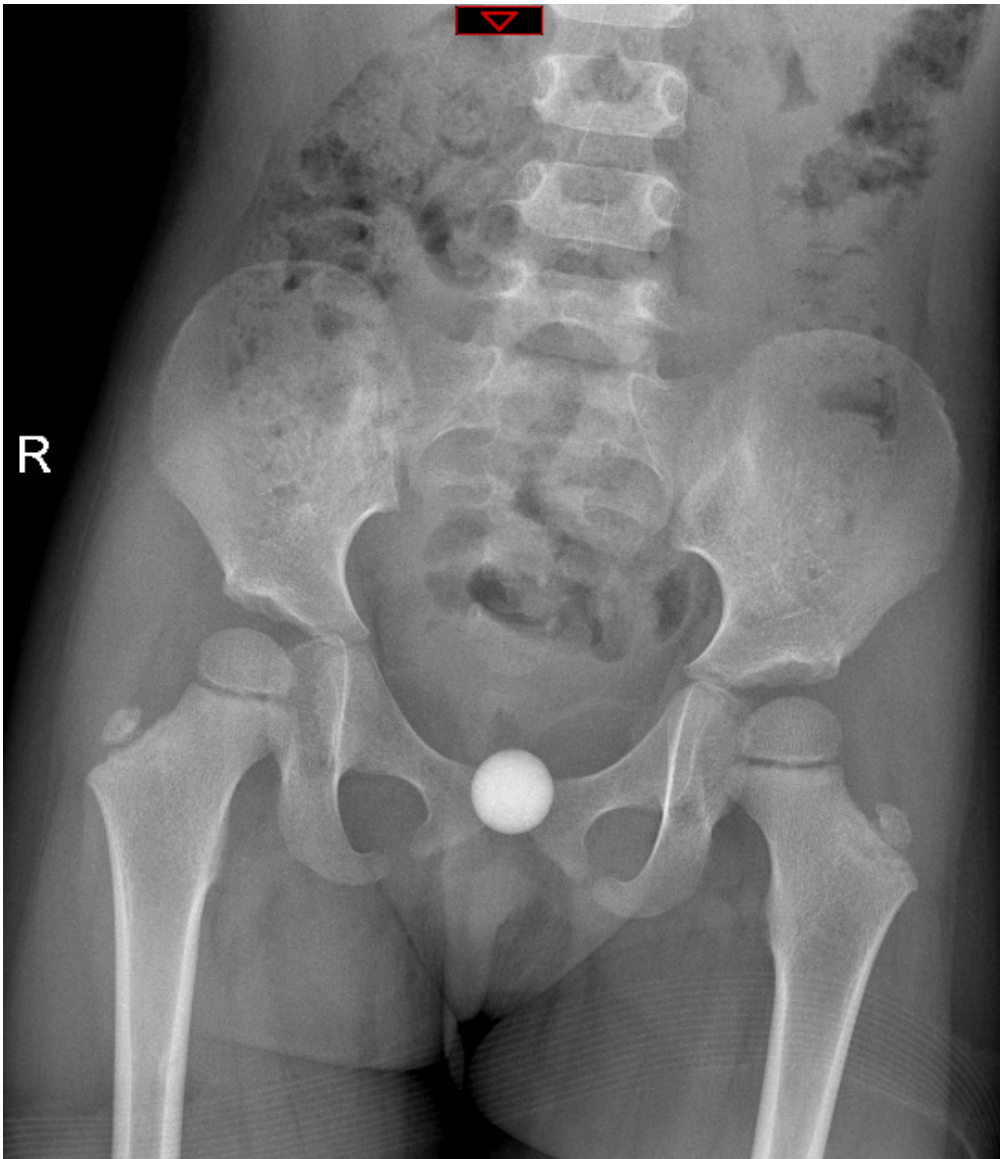


Figure 6

Abdominal X-ray suggests a vaginal foreign body, which is a glass ball.

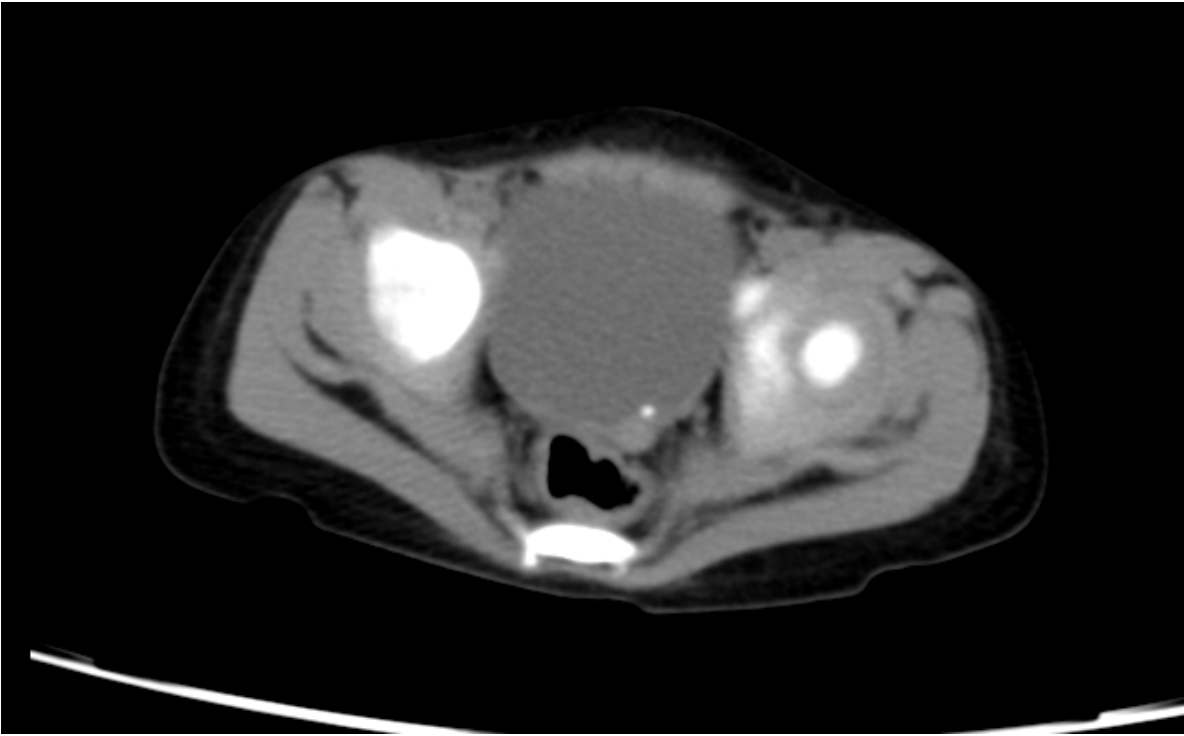


Figure 7

CT scan indicates a bladder foreign body resembling grains of rice.



Figure 8

CT scan indicates a vaginal foreign body, which is a glass ball.