

POISON PREVENTION

Every year, thousands of children require emergency room treatment for poisonous ingestion. Many more are treated at home under the supervision of the Poison Control Center. Most poisonings occur when a household routine has been interrupted: company in the home, visiting grandma, illness in the family, holidays, etc. And most poisonings occur when the substance is being used. Many child poisonings can be prevented if parents and caregivers are properly informed.

Why are young children especially vulnerable to poisoning?

- Children learn first through their mouths; babies put everything into their mouths.
- Young children are attracted to the bright colors of products and product labels.
- Many poisonous substances have interesting smells.
- Children may recognize a product from TV.
- Children can't tell the difference between a gallon jug of blue car windshield cleaner and a gallon jug of blue juice.
- Children are great imitators and like to do what they see adults do.
- Teach children to "always ask first" before tasting, touching or smelling anything.
- Keep the Poison Control Center number by your telephone.

Medicine

- Keep medicine “out of reach, out of sight,” in a locked cabinet.
 - Keep medicine out of cupboards containing food.
 - Child-resistant caps are not childproof — many children figure out how to open these containers.
 - Avoid keeping medicine in purses, briefcases, etc.
 - Dispose of old or expired medications.
 - Keep medications in the original, labeled container.
 - Adults should avoid taking medicine in front of children.
 - Never call medicine, even vitamins, “candy” or make a game out of taking medicine.
 - Never give one person’s prescription medication to another person.
 - When you give medicine to a child, take the medication TO the child, rather than taking the child to where the medicine is kept.
 - Vitamins are considered medicine and should be treated that way. Taking too many, especially those containing iron, can be deadly for a child.
 - When you have medicine out, take it with you if the phone or doorbell rings rather than leaving it in sight. It only takes minutes for a child to be poisoned.
 - Be especially cautious when you are in someone else’s home. People without children often leave medications on the kitchen table or the bathroom counter.
 - Elderly people often choose to get their medications WITHOUT child-resistant caps. Be careful at grandma’s house.
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Chemicals

- Cleaning products, fertilizers, pesticides, bleach, car products (antifreeze, windshield cleaner) and gasoline are all examples of potential substances that can cause chemical poisoning if ingested.
- Store all chemicals out of sight and out of reach, preferably in a locked cupboard.
- Never put chemicals in anything other than the original container.
- Purchase these products in child-resistant containers.
- Remember that chemicals can also cause contact poisoning if spilled on the skin and eye injury if splashed in the eyes.

Plants

- Call your county extension office for a list of dangerous plants.
- Know the names of all the plants in your home and yard and make sure none are toxic.
- When you purchase a new plant for the home or yard, check on its safety first.
- Teach children to never eat leaves, berries or mushrooms they find in the yard or park.

Inhalation hazards

- Poisoning can occur by breathing in toxic substances.
 - Keep children away from the fumes of idling cars.
 - Always use ventilation when using strong glues, paints or other chemicals and keep children away from these areas.
 - As children get older, teach them about the danger of “huffing” – purposely inhaling strong smelling substances like glue, markers, cleaning products, etc.
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Everyday products

- Mouthwash and perfumes can be a potential hazard to young children because of their high alcohol content.
- Products like cosmetics and hair dye can also be a potential poisoning hazard.
- Cigarette butts contain chemicals that can make a young child sick and should be disposed of immediately.

What should you do if your child is accidentally poisoned?

- If your child is unconscious, having trouble breathing or having a seizure, call 911.
- Never take any action to counteract the poison without calling the Poison Control Center. For instance, sometimes making a child vomit makes the poisoning injury worse.
- Have the substance with you when you call, so that you can read the label to the Poison Control Center.
- Be ready to give the child's age, weight and the time the poisoning occurred.
- Be ready to estimate how much of the substance the child ate or drank.
- POISON CONTROL CENTER
1-800-222-1222

For more information,
contact the Family Life Educators
at 605-322-3660 or email us at
familylifeeducators@avera.org.