

Protect Your Child From Poison

Part I Prevention and Treatment



Children can get very sick if they come in contact with medications, household pesticides, chemicals, cosmetics, or plants. This can happen at any age and can cause serious reactions. However, most children who come in contact with poison are *not* permanently harmed if they are treated right away. This brochure has been developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics to inform parents how to prevent poisonings and what to do if their child has been poisoned.

Prevention

Young children are poisoned most commonly by things in the home such as:

- drugs and medications (iron medications are one of the most common causes of poisonings in children under age 5)
- cleaning products
- plants
- cosmetics
- pesticides
- paints and solvents

Most poisonings occur when parents are not paying close attention. If you are ill or stressed, you may not watch your child as closely as usual. The hectic routine of getting dinner on the table causes so many lapses in parental attention that late afternoon is known as “the arsenic hour” by poison center personnel.

In addition, children like to put things into their mouths and taste things. This is a natural way for children to learn about the world around them. Children also copy adults without knowing what they are doing.

The best way to prevent poisonings is to lock up all toxic substances where your child cannot get to them. Also, watch your child even more closely whenever you are somewhere that is not childproofed. Be especially attentive when your child is visiting another home, or a grandparent’s home, where child-proofing may not have been done.

Treatment

Swallowed poison

If you find your child with an open or empty container of a toxic substance, your child may have been poisoned. Stay calm and act quickly.

First, get the poison away from your child. If there is still some in your child’s mouth, make him spit it out, or remove it with your fingers. Keep this material along with any other evidence that might help determine what was swallowed.

Next, check for these signs:

- severe throat pain
- breathing difficulty
- sudden behavior changes, such as unusual sleepiness, irritability, or jumpiness
- unexplained nausea or vomiting
- stomach cramps without fever
- burns on your child’s lips or mouth
- unusual drooling, or odd odors on your child’s breath
- unexplained stains on your child’s clothing
- convulsions or unconsciousness (only in very serious cases)

If your child has any of these signs, call 911 right away. Take the poison container with you to help the doctor determine what was swallowed. *Do not make your child vomit*, as this may cause further damage. Also, *do not follow instructions about poisoning on the label* of the container, as these are often out of date.

If your child does not have these symptoms, call your regional poison center or pediatrician. They will need the following information in order to help you:

- Your name and phone number
- Your child’s name, age, and weight
- Any medical conditions your child may have
- Any medications your child may be taking
- The name of the substance your child swallowed. Read it off the container and spell it.
- The ingredients of the substance your child swallowed if they are listed on the label. If your child has swallowed a prescription medicine, give all the information on the label including the name of the drug. If the name of the drug is not on the label, give the name and phone number of the pharmacy, and the date of the prescription.
- What the pill looked like (if you can tell) and if it had any printed numbers on it. If your child swallowed another substance, such as a part of a plant, describe it as much as you can to help identify it.
- The time your child swallowed the poison (or when you found your child), and the amount you think was swallowed

If the poison is extremely dangerous, or if your child is very young, you may be told to make him vomit and take him directly to the nearest hospital. Otherwise, you will be given instructions to follow at home.

Syrup of ipecac

If you are told to make your child vomit, give him syrup of ipecac in the recommended dose. Encourage your child to drink a glass of water as well.

Place your child over your lap, face down, the head lower than the hips. Get ready to catch the vomit in a large bowl so that it can be inspected or until your pediatrician or the poison center tells you to throw it away. If your child vomits for more than 2 hours after taking the syrup of ipecac, or shows any of the symptoms described earlier, call your pediatrician. If your child does not vomit within 20 minutes after taking the syrup of ipecac, repeat the dose once.

In some cases vomiting may be dangerous, so never make a child vomit unless the poison center tells you to do so. Strong acids (such as toilet bowl cleaner) or strong alkalis (such as lye, drain or oven cleaner, or dishwasher detergent) can burn the throat—and vomiting will only make the damage worse. In such cases you probably will be told to have the child drink milk or water.

Recommended dosage schedule for syrup of ipecac:

- 1 month to 1 year—check with your pediatrician or poison center
- 1 year to 10 years—½ ounce (1 tablespoon or 3 teaspoons or 15 milliliters) followed by two glasses of water

Poison on the skin

If your child spills a dangerous chemical on her body, remove her clothes and rinse the skin with lukewarm—not hot—water. If the area shows signs of being burned, continue rinsing for at least 15 minutes, no matter how much your child may protest. Then call the poison center for further advice. Do not use ointments or grease.

Poison in the eye

Flush your child's eye by holding the eyelid open and pouring a steady stream of lukewarm water into the inner corner. A young child is sure to object to this, so get another adult to hold your child while you rinse the eye. If that is not possible, wrap your child tightly in a towel and clamp him under one arm. This way you will have one hand free to hold the eyelid open and the other to pour in the water. Continue flushing the eye for 15 minutes. Then call the poison center for further instructions. Do not use an eyecup, eyedrops, or ointment unless the poison center tells you to do so.

Poison fumes

In the home, poisonous fumes can come from:

- a car running in a closed garage
- leaky gas vents
- wood, coal, or kerosene stoves that are not working properly

If your child is exposed to fumes or gases, get her into fresh air right away. If she is breathing, call the poison center for further instructions. If she has stopped breathing, start CPR and do not stop until she breathes on her own or someone else can take over. If you can, have someone call 911 right away. If you are alone, wait until your child is breathing or, after 1 minute of CPR, call 911.

Be prepared

Be prepared for a poisoning emergency by posting the poison center phone number by every phone in your home. To locate the nearest poison center, call 202/362-7217, or write to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, 3201 New Mexico Avenue, NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20016.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

