



Central Office: 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT 06109 Phone (860) 721-2822 Fax (860) 721-2823
Berlin: 240 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT 06037 Phone (860) 828-7017 Fax (860) 828-9248
Newington: 131 Cedar Street, Newington, CT 06111 Phone (860) 665-8586 Fax (860) 665-8533
Rocky Hill: 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067 Phone (860) 258-2770 Fax (860) 258-2767
www.ccthd.org

March 19, 2012

Most Poisonings Can Be Prevented

What do cosmetics, household cleaning supplies, medicines, pesticides, pool chemicals, certain plants, automotive supplies, tobacco products, hobby supplies, and personal care products have in common? Not only can these items be found in nearly everyone's home, they are all classified as poisons. A poison is anything anyone eats, breathes, or gets on the skin that can cause sickness, injury or death. When used improperly or in the wrong amount, nearly every product we use has the potential to be poisonous, making the task of poison prevention a difficult one.

In an effort to heighten public awareness about preventing accidental poisonings, the week of March 18-24, 2012 has been designated National Poison Prevention Week. Since the vast majority of poisonings are unintentional, they can be prevented. Did you know that every year, approximately 1.2 million children ages 5 and under are unintentionally poisoned?

Because children are naturally curious and want to emulate the behaviors of the adults in their lives, they are particularly at risk because they do not know the difference between the poisonous and non-poisonous substances. Parents often assume they have adequately protected their children by placing hazardous materials high above the child's reach. However, children are able to climb to high places and more than one child has been known to ingest substances that a parent thought was out of reach. Parents also assume that the safety caps on medications will prevent their child from gaining access. Safety caps are not child-proof, they are merely child resistant, which simply means that 80% of four-year olds cannot open the container. Since most parents believe their child is above average in other areas, they would be wise to assume their child falls within the 20% who do manage to open safety caps. Also, child safety locks on cabinet doors and drawers only work for a certain amount of time, as children eventually learn how to open them. A better solution for parents is to keep all medications and toxic substances in a locked cabinet, with a key hidden in a safe place.

Additional steps also can be taken to reduce the likelihood of a child being poisoned:

- Store medications and household products only in their original containers; never put inedible products in food or drink containers.
- Use child resistant packages whenever possible, but recognize their limitations.
- Keep ipecac syrup and activated charcoal on hand, but never use them unless instructed to by a poison control center.
- Follow product warning labels about not mixing different substances, using gloves or other protective clothing and ventilating the area.
- Teach children not to eat or drink anything unless given to them by an adult they know.
- Try to be more attentive during stressful times, when you are more likely to be more careless.
- Do not take medications in front of young children, and never call medication "candy".
- Discard old medications and dangerous substances you no longer use.
- Keep children away from areas that have been recently sprayed with pesticides.
- Teach children not to eat mushrooms, berries, or leaves found growing in the yard, and keep poisonous plants away from children.

Most of the time, an adult will not see a child ingest a poison, so it is very important that adults watch for any behavior that seems unusual, such as being sleepy or jittery, or sudden vomiting. Adults should pay attention to strong odors on a child's breath, or any traces of pills or powders in a child's mouth or around the lips. Burn marks in or around the mouth might be signs that a caustic substance may have been swallowed. If a child stops breathing, an adult should suspect poisoning may have occurred. If any of these symptoms are present, a poison control center should be contacted immediately. If the child is unconscious, having seizures or not breathing, call 911 immediately.

Children are not the only people who are accidentally poisoned. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), every day more than 82 people die as a result of unintentional poisoning; another 1,941 are treated in emergency departments. While bright colors, pleasant scents and interesting packaging attracts children and encourages them to ingest toxic substances, most adults are poisoned as a result of mistaken identity (especially among seniors) and misuse. Unintentional poisoning can be prevented by reading and heeding instructions and warnings, putting on eyeglasses and turning on the light when taking a medication, storing all substances in their original containers, never using someone else's medicine, discarding outdated medicines and products, as well as never mixing alcohol with medication.

Fortunately, most poisonings can be treated safely at home over the telephone, with the immediate assistance of a poison control center. For poisons that are inhaled, the victim should be moved to some place with fresh air if it can be done safely. If a poison gets on the skin, the contaminated clothing should be removed and the area rinsed with plenty of running water for 15-20 minutes. Similarly, poison in an eye should be flushed with running water for 15-20 minutes. In all situations, it is important to call a poison control center as soon as possible.

Toxic substances that have been swallowed require a little more information in order to successfully treat the victim. If a chemical has been swallowed, drinking a glass of water is advised. If the substance is a medicine, NO liquid should be drunk. Parents should keep a bottle of ipecac syrup and a container of activated charcoal on hand, but NEITHER should be administered unless directed to do so by the poison control center. Ipecac will induce vomiting, but sometimes vomiting can be harmful, such as in the case of poisoning by a substance that burns. Many times, the poison control center will advise administering activated charcoal, which prevents the absorption of many substances into the bloodstream.

Keep the phone numbers of the Connecticut Poison Control Center, the closest hospital and the physician next to the telephone.

For further information about poisoning, contact the American Association of Poison Control Centers at aapcc@poison.org or by phone at 1-800-222-1222. Anyone with questions or concerns about poison control or any other public health issue may contact the Central Connecticut Health District, celebrating 15 years of service, at **860-721-2822** or visit our website at www.ccthd.org.