

Prevent Accidental Poisoning

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Every 30 seconds a child is poisoned in the United States. In 2001, 53% of poisonings occurred in children under the age of six and 92% of all poisonings occurred in the home. Poisoning is the second leading cause of injury hospitalization after accidental falls in children 0-4 years of age. Children are curious by nature and investigate their world by putting most things in their mouths. They will eat or drink anything regardless of how it tastes. Children like the attractive packaging, good smells and are drawn to the colourful substances of many household products. Children are at greater risk than adults because they are smaller, have faster metabolic rates, and are less able to physically handle toxic chemicals.

What do I have around my house that is dangerous?

- All drugs and medications including:
 - Alcohol, Panadol, Tylenol, aspirin, iron tablets, asthma medications, cough and cold medicines, essential oils, antihistamines, vitamins, diet pills and diet supplements, migraine tablets
- In the bathroom
 - Cleaners, toilet sprays and deodorizers, toilet bowl cleaners, perfume, mouthwash, hairspray, cosmetics, nail polish
- Household products
 - Cleaners, furniture polish, oven cleaners, drain cleaners, dishwasher detergent
- Storage or work room
 - Insect sprays, mothballs, paint, glue, batteries, turpentine, pesticides, fertilizers
- Laundry
 - Detergents, bleach, fabric softeners and pet products
- Household plants
 - Including poinsettia, azaleas, swiss cheese plant, geraniums, oleander
 - Hong Kong native plants

St John's Lily, Sea Mango, Jimson Weed, Poisonous Tomato and Mountain Orange (for more information and pictures see www.hiking.com.hk or the agriculture and fisheries department website.

Ways to reduce the risk of poisoning

Medicines

- Store medicines out of reach and out of sight of your child in a cabinet or cupboard with a child resistant lock
- Don't confuse your child by referring to medicines as candy. Medicines and candy look alike and children cannot tell the difference
- Check the correct medication and dosage by carefully reading the labels. Taking more than recommended may be harmful
- After each dose of medicine, lock it away

- Avoid giving non-prescription medications routinely without consulting a doctor.
- Be aware of medicines that visitors may bring into your home. Children are curious and may investigate visitor's purses and suitcases.
- Clean out medicine cabinets every few months. Dispose old medicines and products you do not use by pouring them down the toilet or drain. Rinse out the sink and flush the toilet.

Household products

- Store dangerous products in a cupboard with a child resistant lock and out of sight of children
- If you are using a product and need to answer the doorbell or telephone, take the child with you. **Most poisonings occur when the product is in use.**
- Store household chemicals and food in separate areas. Mistaken identity could cause serious poisoning. An example of this is apple juice and pine cleaner
- Leave chemicals in their original containers, do not decant into drink bottles
- Choose containers with child resistant caps
- Consider alternative cleaning products. For example a mixture of vinegar and bicarbonate of soda will clean most surfaces.

Plants

- Remove all plants that are regarded as having a high level of toxicity
- Know the names of the plants you have
- Keep poisonous plants out of reach of children and pets
- Teach your children not to eat berries, leaves and mushrooms.
- Keep children and pets away from plants that have recently been sprayed with weed killer, bug killer or fertilizer.

What to do if I think my child has been poisoned

If you think your child has been poisoned call

- Matilda health Line 28490123
- Your doctor
- 999 (emergency services)
- Drugs and Poisons Information Hotline: Prince of Wales Hospital on 26351111 (9 to 5 only)
- Prince of Wales Emergency Department on 26322211
- Queensland Poisons Information Centre 61 7 36368505
- Singapore Poisons Information Centre 65 223 5454

Be prepared to give the product information from the label and information about your child.

Keep emergency numbers by the telephone

If your child vomits, is drowsy, has a substance spilled on her clothes or around her mouth, burns on her skin, or a strange smell on her breath, she may have been poisoned.

References

<http://www.aapcc.org/children.htm>

www.who.int/ipcs/poisons/center/directory

www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/poisoning.htm

http://www.nfpa.org/riskwatch/parent_poison.html

www.vh.org/pediatric/patient/pediatrics/cqqa/poisonprevention.html

Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, (2001) *Poisoning Prevention*, Safety Centre RCH