

Keeping Your Children Safe From Accidental Poisoning

March 20-26 is National Poison Prevention Week, a time when people should think about the dangers of accidental poisonings and how to keep their homes safe for children.

In the United States, more than 90 percent of all poisonings happen in the home, and more than 75 percent of these poisonings are accidental. Most happen to children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years. Follow these tips to keep your children safe.

Medicines

Young children often put things in their mouths. Follow these guidelines to keep drugs out of reach.

- Use child-resistant covers — they save lives. Approximately 900 children have been saved since child-resistant packaging for aspirin and oral prescription medicines were required 30 years ago.
- Keep medicines in locked cabinets. Always put drug vials or containers back into the cabinet immediately after use and lock it up.
- When giving medicine to a child, always use the dosage prescribed or listed on the label according to the child's age, weight, etc. Guessing can lead to overdose.
- Avoid taking medicine in front of children. Refer to medicine as "medicine," not "candy."
- Tell children to never take medicine on their own. If they see an adult take medication, quickly explain why they shouldn't take medication unless given by a parent, healthcare practitioner or trusted adult. Use the same guidelines for vitamins.
- Get rid of old medicines. The best practice is to use a curbside hazardous waste program, but if none are available in your area, safely seal the drugs and throw them in the trash. DO NOT flush them down the toilet.

Products in the Home

Cleaning products, detergents and cosmetics are just some of the household items that can become dangerous in the hands of a child. Here's how to safely use and store these materials.

- Make sure the products have child-resistant covers.
- Store the products in cabinets or drawers that have safety locks.
- Keep all household cleaners and detergents out of the child's sight and reach.
- When products are in use, never let young children out of your sight, even if you must take the child or product along when answering the phone or doorbell.
- After using a product, immediately return it to safe storage.
- Keep products in the containers they came in. Do not put them into food or beverage containers. Leave the original labels on all products and read the label before using. Pay attention to safety guidelines.

- Do not leave a purse where a child can reach it.
- When possible, use non-toxic cleaners and cosmetics.

Pesticides

A recent survey by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency showed that almost half of all households with children under the age of 5 had at least one pesticide stored in an unlocked cabinet within the reach of children. Here's how to help keep pesticides (bug spray, weed killer, rodent or ant traps, etc.) safe from kids.

- Always store pesticides away from children's reach, in a locked cabinet or garden shed.
- Read the label first and follow the directions before spraying or applying. Pay attention to the safety guidelines.
- Before applying pesticides (indoors and outdoors), remove children and their toys from the area and keep them away until it is dry or deemed safe according to the instruction label.
- Never leave pesticides unattended when you are using them.
- Never put pesticides in other containers, especially those used for food or drink.
- Close the container tightly after use.

Other Concerns

- Houseplants not meant to be eaten aren't usually deadly, but they can make a child sick. If you have plants in your home, make sure you keep them out of a child's reach.
- Keep alcohol away from children. This can be especially dangerous if alcoholic drinks are left in the child's reach during or after a party.
- If swallowed, button-sized batteries (used in watches, calculators, cameras and hearing aids) usually pass through a person without any problem. But in some cases, they may cause poisoning and internal burns if they become lodged in the esophagus or intestinal tract. Keep the batteries out of children's reach and throw away old batteries.
- Carbon monoxide results in more deadly accidental poisonings in the United States than any other agent, with the highest number occurring during the winter months. Make sure your house has a carbon monoxide detector that's in good working condition.

Who to Call

If you think your child has ingested or touched a potentially poisonous product, immediately contact the Poison Control Center at 800-222-1222. Keep the telephone number on your phone. ■

RESOURCES

- National Poison Prevention Council. (2005). Editor's fact sheet. Retrieved Feb. 17, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.poisonprevention.org/faq.html>
- National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2004). Poisonings: Fact sheet. Retrieved Feb. 17, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/poisoning.htm>
- Pediatric Safety Group. (2003). Poisoning prevention. Retrieved Feb. 17, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.psgweb.org/downloads/Poisoning.pdf>

The purpose of this patient education handout is to further explain or remind you about a medical condition. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, be sure to discuss them with your healthcare provider. This handout may be reproduced for distribution to patients.