



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT POISONINGS

### TOPICS

- Basic First Aid Tips
- Calling Poison Help
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- Household Products
- Medicine
- Pesticides or Pest Killers
- Pets and Animals
- Emergency Response
- Carbon Monoxide (CO)

### Basic First Aid Tips

#### ***A poisoning may have occurred. What should I do?***

Follow these basic steps at the first sign of a poisoning:

- **The person inhaled poison.**
  - Get to fresh air right away.
  - Call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222).
- **The person has poison on the skin.**
  - Take off any clothing the poison touched.
  - Rinse skin with running water for 15 to 20 minutes.
  - Call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222).
- **The person has poison in the eyes.**
  - Rinse eyes with running water for 15 to 20 minutes.
  - Call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222).

In some cases, you should not try to give first aid. You will need to call the experts fast if:

- **The person swallowed the wrong medicine or too much medicine.**
  - Call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222).
- **The person swallowed a chemical, pesticide, or other poison.**
  - Call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222).
- **The person has collapsed or stopped breathing.**
  - Call 911 or your local emergency number.

### Calling Poison Help

#### ***What is the nationwide Poison Help number?***

The nationwide Poison Help phone number is 1-800-222-1222. When you call the number, you will reach a Poison Center COVERING YOUR AREA.

#### ***What should I do when I need to call the experts?***

Keep emergency numbers near the phone. When you call Poison Help or 911, be ready to give information (listed below) to the expert on the phone. It is important to stay calm. Not all medicines and household products are poisonous. Not all contact with poison results in poisoning.

When you call, bring with you the container of the product you think caused the poisoning. The label has important information. When calling Poison Help, be ready (if you can) to tell the expert:

- the person's age
- the person's weight
- health conditions or problems
- the product involved

- how the product contacted the person (for example, by mouth, by inhaling, through the skin, or through the eyes)
- how long ago the poison contacted the person
- first aid already given
- whether the person has vomited
- your location
- how long it would take you to get to a hospital

If medicine has been swallowed, do not give anything by mouth until you've talked to a Poison Help expert.

### ***Who will answer the phone when I call 1-800-222-1222?***

An expert answers the phone at a poison center. You will reach a pharmacist, nurse, doctor, or other poison expert. All of them have passed special training to handle poison emergencies. Also, the person who answers will be an EXPERT ON YOUR COMMUNITY. These experts are trusted by local doctors, pharmacists, nurses, and emergency workers. And they offer the best information on poison-related questions and treatments.

### ***What should I do if I think someone has been poisoned?***

- Call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222) right away!
- A poison expert will tell you exactly what to do. If necessary, the poison center may stay on the phone with you while you get other help. The expert may call you later to ask if you need further help.
- DO NOT wait to call! If you call right away, the problem can often be solved over the phone. Do not wait for signs of poisoning!

### ***Why should I call a poison center?***

- Poison experts are at poison centers, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When doctors and nurses have questions about poisons, even they may call the poison center.

- When you call the poison center in an emergency, often your problem can be solved on the phone. The call is fast and free. It could save you from calling an ambulance when you don't need one. It could save you from making a trip to the emergency room.
- If you need a doctor or ambulance, the poison expert will tell you right away. The expert may also call the clinic or emergency room. He or she will give important treatment information. This means no time will be lost when the patient arrives.

### ***Can I call Poison Help if I just have a question, not a poisoning emergency?***

Yes. Poison Help can answer most questions about poisons.

### ***What is done with all the information I give the poison center?***

A written record is made for all calls. The information is entered into a chart. Treatment advice from poison center staff is recorded. Information from follow-up calls is recorded too. All information is KEPT PRIVATE.

### ***How can I be prepared for a poisoning emergency?***

- Call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222) or visit the Poison Help Web site (<http://PoisonHelp.hrsa.gov>) to ask for phone stickers or magnets with the emergency number. Keep the number on or near all your phones. Enter the number into the speed dials of all your phones.
- If you are taking care of a child, have all the child's health information on hand in case of an emergency.
- See the Poison Help Brochure ([link](#)) and Seasonal Tip Sheets ([link](#)) for more information.

### ***Will the poison center call me to follow up?***

If needed, the poison center will call you. Poison center staff will know how many times to check on the patient. The number of calls depends on the type of exposure and on the patient's health.

### ***What type of person most often calls Poison Help?***

Most often, callers are people taking care of children under age 6. Each year, in the United States, about 1 million possible poisonings among children under 6 are reported. Most of these involve children between ages 2 and 3. More than half of the possible poisonings that are reported in the United States are for children under age 5.

### ***Are caregivers of young children the only callers to Poison Help?***

No. Poisoning can happen to anyone, of any age. Adults may need the poison center's help (for example, if they are splashed with a poison at work, or are bitten by a spider, or use a strong cleaning product without gloves). Misuse of medicines causes many poisonings in teens, adults, and older people. In fact, most deaths from poisoning happen in adults, not young children.

### ***When is Poison Help the busiest?***

The busiest time for poison centers is summer. Children are out of school. They are more likely to come in contact with possible poisons (such as berries, flowers, insect bites and stings, car care products, charcoal lighter fluid, pest killers, and plant food). The busiest time of the day for poison centers is evening. Poison centers plan for these busy times, so that calls will be answered quickly.

## Poisonings

### General

#### ***What is a poison?***

A poison is anything that can harm someone if it is (1) used in the wrong way, (2) used by the wrong person, or (3) used in the wrong amount. Poisons may harm you when they get in the eyes or on the skin. Other poisons may harm you if you breathe them in or swallow them.

#### ***What are the different forms of poison?***

Poison comes in four forms: solids (such as medicine pills or tablets), liquids (such as gasoline), sprays (such as spray cleaners) and gases (such as carbon monoxide, or CO). Examples of poisons include:

- alcohol
- carbon monoxide (CO) gas
- medicines, such as prescription, over-the-counter, and illegal drugs (Pain killers, cold and cough medicines, cocaine.)
- food supplements, such as vitamins, minerals, and herbal products
- personal care products, such as nail polish and nail polish remover, cologne, aftershave, deodorant, mouthwash, hydrogen peroxide, makeup, soap, contact lens solutions, lotions, baby oil, and diaper rash products
- household chemicals, including bleach, detergent, furniture polish, cleanser, drain and toilet bowl cleaners, antifreeze, gasoline, paints, and varnishes
- plants, including many house plants and mushrooms
- bites and stings, including snake and spider bites, and scorpion, wasp, and bee stings
- hazardous chemicals at work and in the environment

### ***What does a poisoned person look like?***

A poisoned person may or may not look, act, or feel sick. If you think someone has been poisoned, call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222) right away. DO NOT WAIT for signs of poisoning.

### ***Why are so many poisonings related to children under age 6?***

Children under age 6 are always exploring the world around them. This is the way they learn. It is normal behavior and should be allowed, when safe. But what children see and can reach, they often put in their mouths. Parents and other caregivers must watch for this. They must teach children not to put strange things in their mouths.

As children begin to move and do more, risks increase. They can reach medicines and household products wherever they are stored. When children are crawling, they can find such products as drain cleaners stored under a kitchen sink or on the floor. As soon as children can stand, they can reach products on low tables. They can reach medicines in purses on beds. When children start to climb, they can reach medicine on counters or in medicine cabinets. These products should be locked up. They should be kept out of the child's reach even when safety containers are used. They should be locked up even when safety packaging is used. Never leave medicine or a household product unattended. Children act fast! They can get to a product and swallow it while you are answering the phone or doorbell. Take the child or product with you to answer the phone or doorbell.

## **Household Products**

### ***My child likes to eat toothpaste. Is this dangerous?***

Toothpaste contains fluoride. Fluoride can be dangerous in certain amounts. Usually there is not enough fluoride in a tube of toothpaste to cause a serious poisoning. But you should teach your child that eating toothpaste is unsafe. Taking too much toothpaste can cause short- and long-term problems. If you think your child may have eaten toothpaste, call 1-800-222-1222 and get advice.

### ***What should I do with the mercury from a broken thermometer?***

If mercury is spilled and not cleaned up, it gives off fumes. These fumes are poisonous if breathed in. Any spilled mercury should be cleaned up fast. How do you clean up mercury? Do not vacuum it. Call 1-800-222-1222 for advice on cleaning up.

### ***Can mouthwash be dangerous?***

Yes. Mouthwash often contains alcohol. To a young child, even a small amount of alcohol can be deadly. Some mouthwash might taste good to a child. A child might drink a large amount of it. Many other personal care products contain alcohol (for example, germ killers for cleaning hands and acne treatment products). Keep all mouthwash and other personal care products out of the sight and out of reach. Keep them locked up.

### ***Why is it dangerous to use drink containers to store household products and other strong chemicals?***

Children and adults might think poisons stored in drink containers are drinks. Such mistakes can be deadly.

### ***Is the lead in paint dangerous to children?***

In the past, paints contained high levels of lead. But in 1971, Congress set safety standards for lead in paint products. The standards apply to paints or coatings on toys or other items used by children. But threats still exist from old buildings and some products. Children can be poisoned by eating paint chips or breathing dust from old lead paint. During remodeling and renovation projects, workers and families face danger when improperly removing paint from older buildings. These types of projects are one of the major causes of lead poisoning in the home. Be aware that toys made in countries outside the United States can contain unsafe amounts of lead. Doctors can test children for lead poisoning.

### ***What are some rules I can follow to prevent poisonings?***

- Choose products in containers that are hard for children to open. Replace the cap tightly after using a product. Remember that no container can promise to keep children out.
- Keep all household products, other strong chemicals, and medicines locked up and out of sight.
- When products are in use, never let young children out of your sight. Take the child or product with you when answering the phone or doorbell.
- Keep products in the containers they came in.
- Leave product labels on all products. Read the label before using a product.
- Do not put lamps and candles that use lamp oil where children can reach them. Lamp oil is very poisonous if swallowed or inhaled.
- Take and give medicine in a well-lit area. Check the dosage every time.
- Avoid taking medicine in front of children. NEVER CALL MEDICINE CANDY.
- Clean out the medicine cabinet often. Get rid of medicines that have expired or are no longer needed. See the following section on medicine for safe disposal instructions.

## **Medicine**

### ***I found some pills in an unlabeled bottle. How do I find out what they are?***

Some poison centers can identify pills. Call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222) or your local pharmacy

### ***Is it dangerous to take expired medicine?***

Yes. It can be dangerous to take expired medicine. Never take expired medicine because the medicine might not work anymore. The expiration date is there for your protection.

### ***How can I get rid of medicines safely?***

Get rid of medicines that have expired or are no longer needed. Ask your local pharmacist how you can return unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs to pharmaceutical take-back locations for safe disposal. If this is not available, take the unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs out of their original containers. Mix the drugs with an undesirable substance, such as kitty litter, and put them in waterproof containers, such as empty cans or sealable bags, to make sure that they are not found and used by people or animals. Throw these containers in the trash. Your poison center may have updated advice available for your area by calling 1-800-222-1222.

### ***Are adults at risk when they use medicines and household products?***

Yes. Poisonings happen to adults. They may have trouble reading labels. They may fail to follow instructions, or they may mix chemicals together. Some people may confuse one medicine for another. Others may take too much of a medicine.

To avoid poisonings:

- Always read the label and follow instructions when taking medicines. If any questions arise, consult your pharmacist or doctor.
- Wear your glasses when reading medicine labels. Turn a light on for reading at night.

- Never mix medicines and alcohol. Never take more than the proper dosage or prescribed amount of medicine.
- Never take another person's prescription drugs.
- Tell your doctor what other medicines you are taking, when he or she orders medicine for you.
- Never mix household products with other chemicals. Doing this can create poisonous gases.
- Keep products in the containers they came in.

### ***What can people do to protect themselves from medicines that have been tampered with?***

Most medicines come in packaging that prevents tampering. That doesn't mean it can't happen. Each person must be on the lookout. Here is how you can protect yourself and your family:

- Check outer packaging. Look before you buy.
- Read the label. Over-the-counter medicines tell you on the label how to detect tampering.
- If you think there could be a problem with a drug or its package, show the store manager.
- Check the product inside after you open it. Look again before you take the product. If it looks strange, don't use it.
- Look for pills that are different from others in the package.
- Do not use any medicine from a package that has cuts, slices, tears or other marks.
- Never take medicine in the dark.
- Read the label and look at the medicine every time you take it.
- Lower chances of medicine errors by being alert!

## **Pesticides or Pest Killers**

### ***How much DEET is harmful for children?***

Most products that keep insects away contain DEET. DEET is taken in through the skin. DEET is safe if the right amount is used properly. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using products with no more than 6 to 10 percent DEET on children. Adults can safely use products with up to 30 percent DEET. Be careful when using DEET. Always read the label before using any bug repellent. Some contain 100 percent DEET. These products are very poisonous.

## **Pets and Animals**

### ***What should I do if my pet is poisoned?***

Some poison centers offer help for poisoned animals. Others can refer you to the Animal Poison Control Center Helpline: 1-888-426-4435. Unlike Poison Help, which is free, there is a fee for calling the Animal Poison Control Center Helpline.

## **Emergency Response**

### ***What should I do if my child swallows something poisonous?***

Call Poison Help (1-800-222-1222) right away. Because every poisoning is different, treatment advice will depend on the type and amount of poison involved. The child's age, weight, and medical history will affect treatment too.

### ***Should I use activated charcoal when I suspect someone has been poisoned?***

No. Activated charcoal takes up certain poisons, but it is difficult to use. Your poison center will decide if activated charcoal should be used. The poison center may call a hospital to advise that type of treatment.

### Carbon Monoxide (CO)

#### *What is CO and where does it come from?*

Carbon monoxide (CO) is gas. It has no color or smell. It is produced under certain conditions when fuel is burned. Cars, appliances, furnaces, and gas dryers can give off CO.

#### *What is CO poisoning?*

CO takes the place of oxygen in the blood. Without oxygen, the heart, lungs, brain, and other body parts cannot work properly. Signs of CO poisoning are like signs of flu. They include upset stomach, tiredness, and headaches. If CO poisoning is not treated, it can cause seizures and even death.

#### *What should I do if I think I've been exposed to CO?*

Get outside to get fresh air. Call 1-800-222-1222. If you feel better when you are out of your home and worse when you return, CO may be present. If you notice this, call the fire department. Have the fire department check for CO in your house. If CO is present, the source must be repaired before it is safe to return home.

#### *How can I prevent CO poisoning?*

- Have at least one CO alarm in your home. The best places for a CO alarm are near bedrooms and close to furnaces.
- Have your heating system, vents, and chimney checked every year by experts.
- Always follow product instructions for installing and repairing appliances that burn fuel.
- Never burn charcoal inside a house or garage.
- Never use a gas oven to heat a house or apartment.
- Never use unvented fuel-burning devices in a house or apartment.
- Never run a car in a closed garage.

