



# National Poison Prevention Week

## March 15 – 21, 2009

### Fact Sheet

**Q. What is National Poison Prevention Week?**

A. Public Law 87-319 authorizes the President to designate annually the third week of March as National Poison Prevention Week. This act of Congress was signed into law on September 16, 1961, by President Kennedy, after which the Poison Prevention Week Council was organized to coordinate this annual event. Congress intended this event as a means for local communities to raise awareness of the dangers of accidental poisonings and to take such preventive measures as the dangers warrant.

**Q. Is there a theme for this year's National Poison Prevention Week?**

A. Yes, there are two themes this year - "*Children Act Fast, So Do Poisons* and *Poisonings Span a Lifetime.*" The first theme reminds parents to always be watchful when household chemicals or drugs are being used. Many incidents happen when adults are using a product but are distracted (for example, by the telephone or the doorbell) for a few moments. Adults must make sure household chemicals and medicines are stored away from children at all times. The other theme is meant to increase awareness that poisonings can happen to people of any age including children, adults, and older adults.

**Q. If my child eats or drinks a substance that might be a poison, where can I find information on treatment?**

A. If you think someone has been poisoned, call the **New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES), the state's Poison Control Center, immediately at 1-800-222-1222**. A healthcare professional will answer your call. These Specialists in Poison Information (SPI) are available to provide immediate emergency treatment advice for all kinds of poison exposures. The Poison Help Hotline services are free and confidential, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Translation and TTD/TTY services are available. The Poison Help Hotline may also be used if you have questions about drug interactions, medicine side effects, medicine errors, poisons in and around your home, poison prevention, pesticide safety, poison-proofing your home, food poisoning, bites/stings, etc.

**Q. If I find my youngster playing with a bottle of medicine or some household product, how can I tell if he or she has swallowed some and what should I do?**

A. Reactions vary, depending on the product. Sometimes the child may vomit; or he or she may appear to be drowsy or sluggish. Some of the substance may remain around the child's mouth and teeth. There may be burns around the lips or mouth from corrosive items; or you may be able to smell the product on the child's breath. If a household chemical has been ingested, or **even if you suspect, but don't know for sure, that your child has ingested a potentially hazardous product**. Call your Poison Control Center, emergency department, or physician. Place these telephone numbers on your phone.

**Q. Why are so many poisonings related to children younger than 6 years of age?**

A. Children under the age of six are in stages of growth and development in which they are constantly exploring and investigating the world around them. This is the way they learn. It is a normal characteristic and should not be discouraged. Unfortunately, what children see and reach for they usually put in their mouths. It is this hazard to which parents must be alerted. As the youngsters' mobility, ingenuity, and capabilities increase, they can reach medicines and household chemicals even if stored up high. For instance, when children are crawling, they can find such products as drain cleaners stored under the kitchen sink and on the floor. As soon as they are able to stand, they can reach such products as furniture polish on low lying tables, as well as medications in purses on beds. When they start to climb, they can reach medicine on countertops or open the medicine cabinet and get to the medicine. These products should be locked up where possible, out of the child's reach - even when safety packaging is used. Adults should never leave a medicine or household chemical product unattended while in use; children act fast and can get hold of a product and swallow it during the short time while the adult is answering the telephone or doorbell. Advise the caregiver to take the child (or product) with them to answer the phone.

**Help is Just a Phone Call Away! Call 1-800-222-1222 for Poison emergencies and poison-related questions.**

**Q. Why do we need child-resistant packaging?**

A. Although labeling requirements and educational programs have had some effect in reducing the number of childhood ingestions, significant numbers of children are still being poisoned by ingesting household products that can be hazardous. These include medicines (sometimes brought into the child's home by grandparents or other visitors), cleaning products, and solvents. Child-resistant packaging, if used properly, provides an additional barrier to help prevent ingestions.

**Q. Why is it dangerous to use cups or soft-drink bottles to hold paint thinner, turpentine, gasoline, or other household chemicals?**

A. Children associate cups, soft-drink bottles, and drinking glasses with food and drink. For example, fatalities have been reported when lighter fluid intended for outdoor barbecue fires was poured into such containers and subsequently swallowed by children.

**Q. Are there any good housekeeping rules I can use to prevent poisonings?**

- A. (1.) Keep all household chemical products and medicines (especially iron pills and food supplements containing iron) out of sight and reach of youngsters and pets and locked up when not in use. Medicines and household chemicals on kitchen counters or bathroom surfaces are very accessible to young children.
- (2.) When these products are in use, **never let young children out of your sight** - even if you must take them along when answering the telephone or the doorbell.
- (3.) Store all medicines separately from household products, and store all household chemical products away from food.
- (4.) Keep items in their original containers.
- (5.) Leave the original labels on the products, and read the label before using.
- (6.) Always leave the light on when giving or taking medicines.
- (7.) Avoid taking medicines in front of children, since youngsters tend to imitate grown-ups.
- (8.) Refer to medicine as "medicine" - not "candy."
- (9.) Clean out the medicine cabinet periodically, and safely dispose of unneeded medicines when the illness for which they were prescribed is over. Pour contents down drain or toilet, and rinse container before discarding.
- (10.) Finally, use child-resistant packaging properly - by closing the container securely after use.

**Q. Are adults also at risk when they swallow medicines and household chemicals?**

A. Yes, poisonings happen to adults - especially older people - who cannot read labels or who fail to follow instructions. Some people may confuse one medicine for another, especially if the light is not on when they reach for a medicine at night. Others may take too much of a medicine or may mix medicine with alcohol or other substances. Adults should take precautions to avoid poisonings:

- (1.) Turn on a light at night and put on your glasses to read the label when you need to take a medicine.
- (2.) Always read the label and follow instructions when taking medicines. If any questions arise, consult your physician.
- (3.) Never mix medicines and alcohol, and never take more than the prescribed amount of medicine.
- (4.) Never "borrow" a friend's medicine or take old medicines.
- (5.) Tell your doctor what other medicines you are taking so you can avoid adverse drug interactions.

**Q. What can consumers do to protect themselves and their families from medicines that have been tampered with?**

A. Although most medicines are packaged in tamper-evident packaging, they are not tamper-proof. Each consumer must be alert for the packaging to be protective. Here's how you can help protect yourself and your family:

- (1.) **Read the label.** Over-the-counter medicines with safety closures tell you on the label what tamper-evident features you should look for on the package.
- (2.) **Inspect the outer packaging.** Look before you buy!
- (3.) **Inspect the products when you open the package.** Look again before you take it! If it looks suspicious, be suspicious.
- (4.) Look for tablets or capsules that are **different in any way** from others in the package.
- (5.) Don't use any medicine from a package that shows **cuts, slices, tears**, or other imperfections.
- (6.) **Never** take medicine in the dark.
- (7.) Read the label and look at the medicine **every time** you take a dose.
- (8.) Whenever you suspect something wrong with a medicine or its packaging, take it to the store manager.
- (9.) Tamper-evident packaging can help protect you if you are alert!

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