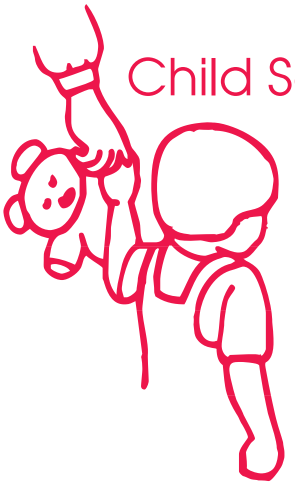

Child Safety Series

Poison Prevention

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

Poisoning is the most easily prevented of all unintentional injuries and deaths. Yet, each year thousands of people ingest toxic substances, and as many as 1,500 die. It is estimated that 130 children age 14 and under are unintentionally poisoned in the United States each year. Most poisonings take place in the home.

The Poison Control Center in Kansas receives 20,000 calls involving children each year. In addition, hospitals and doctor's offices receive frantic calls or visits, as doctors and nurses work feverishly to remove stomach contents of children who swallow medicines, cleaning products, paints, cosmetics, plants and pesticides.

In most cases, the poisonous substances were stored where children could reach them. Some parents not only leave poisons accessible to children, but even allow them to play with safety-cap containers filled with poisonous substances. What these parents don't realize is that child-resistant does not mean childproof. In tests to determine the effectiveness of such containers, children were able to open the containers 20 percent of the time.

If a child is in the household, suspect poisoning any time a pill container, medicine bottle, pesticide or household chemical is found somewhere other than in its proper place, or when it has been left open or unattended outside a cupboard. If you suspect a child has consumed a poisonous substance look for these signs:

- Stains or burns around the mouth
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Ringing in the ears
- Dizziness
- Slurred speech
- Convulsions
- Coma

Also suspect poisoning if a child suddenly becomes ill, and you cannot attribute the illness to a specific cause.

Protect Children

Children age 5 and under are constantly exploring their environment. This is the way they learn. An infant lying in a crib is examining, probing, "taking stock" of surroundings. Unlike an adult, who approaches the unknown with caution and experience, a young child blunders serenely into threatening situations. As children grow, their mobility increases so that relatively more places are accessible to them at ages 4 and 5 than they could reach at age 2. When babies first start to crawl, at about 9 months, they reach, touch and inevitably put things into their mouths. Quite naturally, the products most often involved in accidental poisoning among this age group are those stored on the floor or in floor level cabinets, such as those beneath the kitchen sink. Low tables, night tables, tub ledges and chairs are soon within reach. All substances placed in these locations become the objects of their curious inspection.

At age 3 or 4 agility and mobility reach their peak, and climbing capabilities are recognized and used. The high shelves and medicine cabinet – so distant to the crawling and toddling child – are now easily accessible.

The purpose of poison prevention education is to emphasize proper use and storage of medicines and household products. Studies show that the majority of incidents occur inside the home, mainly in the kitchen and bathroom; and, nearly half the time, when a product is in use. If carelessly placed while being used, or improperly stored, containers of household cleaners can pique children's curiosity and tempt them to taste the contents.

One of the responsibilities of parents and other adult caregivers is to rearrange storage patterns of medicines and household products frequently as the child's reach increases. What was safe storage when a child was crawling becomes an enticing challenge when he or she can climb to the kitchen counter or bathroom sink and reach into higher cabinets.

It is not always feasible to lock up all household cleaners and medicines, but it is possible to reorganize space to set up childproof areas in the home. By adhering to the following safety measures in handling and storing potentially harmful substances, home poisoning can be reduced.

Prevent Poisoning

1. Carefully read directions, special instructions and warnings on packages and containers of household

Substances That Most Frequently Cause Poisoning

The following substances are the most frequent causes of child poisonings. Remain aware of the dangers in and around your home, and practice good preventive measures.

- aspirin and medicines
- insect and rat poisons
- kerosene, benzene, gasoline and cleaning fluids
- paints
- drain cleaners, toilet bowl cleaners and oven cleaners
- oil of wintergreen
- plant sprays
- tobacco (even one cigarette is dangerous to a child)
- boric acid
- nail polish remover
- dishwasher detergent

Poisonous Plants

The following is a sampling of plants, common in and around the home, that are considered poisonous. Parents should see that young children stay away from these plants and teach their children not to touch or taste any plants unless they are known to be safe to eat.

- Azalea (all parts)
- Belladonna
- Bird of Paradise (seeds and pods)
- Castor bean (seeds and leaves)
- Chinaberry (berries, bark, flowers and leaves)
- Holly (berries)
- Hyacinth
- Iris (corms)
- English Ivy (berries and leaves)
- Laurel (all parts)
- Lily of the Valley (all parts)
- Mistletoe (berries)
- Monkshood (all parts)
- Oleander (all parts)
- Philodendron (all parts)
- Pot Mum
- Rhododendron (all parts)
- Rhubarb (leaves)
- Rubber vine
- Tansy
- Tobacco (leaves)
- Tung Oil Tree
- Umbrella Plant
- Yellow Jessamine (all parts)
- Yellow Oleander (all parts)
- Yew (all parts, especially berries)

cleaning and maintenance products. The label also gives helpful first aid information.

2. Keep cleaning products, paints, antifreeze and pesticides in original containers: Don't put them in cups, bowls or soda bottles. A small child may assume it is something to eat or drink. Also, the original container carries a label identifying the product and its manufacturer – essential information in the event the substance is swallowed.

3. Keep the product in view while in use. A pause to answer the doorbell or a phone call is all it takes for a small child to reach an unguarded container. If you use an automatic dishwasher, be sure not to leave the door or lid open after adding dishwasher detergent.

4. Arrange drawers and cabinets for safe storage. Cleaning supplies stored under the kitchen or bathroom sinks, in accessible drawers, or behind easy to open, unlocked cabinet doors are a Pandora's box for a curious child. All household cleaning supplies should be kept in upper cabinets in the kitchen or bath, or on high shelves in linen closets, garages and laundry rooms.

5. Store prescription drugs and other medications, including aspirin and vitamins, well out of reach. Be sure containers have safety tops when possible. Never call medicines "candy." Call them what they are: medicines. Read the label on the package every time you use the medicine to avoid giving the wrong one or too much of the right one. Children are tempted to imitate, so don't take medicines in their presence. If you keep medicines in a purse, keep the purse out of the reach of toddlers.

6. Make sure household cleaning product containers are empty before discarding. Place them in a tightly sealed receptacle. Some injuries occur when a child retrieves items from a garbage pail to use as toys or sample the contents.

7. Check with a physician or poison control center about plant varieties you own. Some house and garden plants are known to be harmful if touched or consumed. See list at left.

8. In addition to a doctor's number, have the number of the poison control center near your telephone.

Poison-proofing a home is not difficult. It may be somewhat inconvenient when storage patterns must be rearranged, but as long as there are toddlers around, it is an adult's responsibility to make the home as safe as possible.

First Aid for Poisoning

When poisoning occurs, it is important to remain calm. Know what the poison was and how much was ingested by the child.

1. Call poison control (1-800-332-6633) or your doctor immediately. (Even if a child feels well, some symptoms may take several hours to develop.)

2. If directed, induce vomiting by administering ipecac syrup.

3. Do not induce vomiting if the poison is petroleum based or corrosive (gasoline, bleach, lye, etc.).

4. If necessary, take the child to an emergency facility. Have the container and label with you.

Checklist for a 'Poison-proof' Home

- Keep all hazardous materials (including cosmetics) out of the reach of children.
- Read and understand all labels.
- Label all poisonous substances correctly, and never put them in containers normally used for food or drink.
- Keep all medicines in their original containers, and give them only to the person for whom they are prescribed.
- Avoid taking medicine in front of children, and never refer to it as "candy."
- Keep a bottle of ipecac syrup handy.
- Write down emergency phone numbers, and keep them near your telephone.

References

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