



## ...About Accidental Poisoning

### Wrong Place, Wrong Time, Wrong Person

When we hear about accidental poisoning we often think of cleaning products and other household chemicals with stark warning labels and columns of fine print that make it clear the product can be very dangerous to use. But there are other poison dangers affecting thousands of people. These are poisonings caused by medicines—kept in bathroom cabinets, in purses, on kitchen windowsills, and even on hospital nightstands.

Medicines are too often stored in the wrong place, or find their way into the wrong hands. Sharing medicines, taking outdated medicines, or using prescription drugs stored in unlabeled containers (where instructions for taking the medicine are missing) can have harmful results.

This booklet may help you prevent accidental drug poisoning and prepare you for a quick response if a poisoning occurs.

#### Remember, when taking medicines:

- do not trust your memory,
- always read the label,
- take as directed, and
- if you have any questions, **Just Ask!**

### Do You Know Where Your Medicines, Your Household Chemicals, and Your Children Are?

Young children often explore floors and lower cupboards. They are naturally curious and will put whatever they discover in their mouths. This exploration is especially dangerous, if the “discovery” is a cleaning product or a medicine, especially an adult medicine. An adult dose of a medicine is particularly dangerous for a child’s immature physical make-up.

Accidental poisoning are often due to carelessness, such as storing a household chemical in a soda bottle—forgetting that a child thinks all soda bottles contain soda. A poisoning may be due to lack of information, such as taking a friend’s medicine to treat “similar” symptoms, which should never be done.

Caustic or corrosive cleaning chemicals account for a large number of unintentional poisonings. These products can damage the skin or internal organs and cause breathing problems or even death if swallowed. A household chemical not stored properly or a medicine not locked in a cupboard is a poisoning waiting to happen.

### Who Do You Call—And When?

#### BETTER TO BE SAFE THAN SORRY

You must act immediately in cases of suspected or known poisonings. **Call 911** if a person is unconscious, convulsing (having seizures), not breathing, or appears to be suffering from any serious effects that could be life-threatening. It is OK to “overreact”! Many poisons act quickly, leaving little time for treatment.

In some cases there may not be any obvious signs of poisoning, particularly in children. A child may show vague symptoms or warning signs such as congestion, crankiness, or drowsiness. Remember, a child may not complain of symptoms and may refuse to tell what happened out of fear of being punished. If you suspect poisoning, do not wait to “see” what effect the substance will have. Call a Poison Control Center immediately (1-800-222-1222)

Posting emergency numbers (poison control, police, fire department, pharmacist, physician, nurse, hospital emergency department, etc.) next to all of your telephones saves valuable time in life-threatening situations. If someone in your family is deaf check with the local Poison Control Center for TTY service.



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Remember, call for help as soon as you know or even suspect a poisoning.

### Poison Prevention Tips

- Do not take or give medicines unless the container labels can be read accurately.
- Do not keep medicines beyond the time of directed use or beyond a year if there are no expiration dates.
- Keep medicine labels attached to medicine containers for quick reference in case of accidental ingestion.
- Flush old medicines down the toilet, then rinse containers, wrap securely, and put in tamper-proof trash cans.
- Label medicine and household chemical containers with symbols. DO NOT store household chemicals in soda bottles or other inappropriate containers.
- Store medicines out of a child's reach, in a cabinet with a safety lock. Generally, medicines should be kept away from heat, light and moisture.

- Take or give medicines according to clear directions from health care providers. Request these directions in writing.
- Use child-resistant caps and keep in the "locked" position if children are in the home or visit occasionally.
- Ask again for directions if the scheduling and dosing instructions are confusing or don't make sense.
- Do not take medicines in front of a child, especially when the child is imitating adult activity, behavior, or expressions.
- Notice the total number of tablets or capsules or amount of liquid printed on the label. Missing tablets, capsules, or liquid can then be estimated in case of accidental ingestion or overdose.
- Refer to medicines by their proper name so children won't think that medicines are candy.
- Do not take or give medicines meant for someone else.
- Protect children from medicines when visiting their grandparent's home and from medicines given to pets.

- Take or give medicines in a lighted room to ensure that the correct medicine has been selected by a "wide-awake" patient or caregiver.
- Remember, when traveling, that children's natural curiosity takes them into purses, backpacks, briefcases, and suitcases.
- If distracted (by telephone or doorbell) while taking a medicine, return it and the container to safe storage.
- Tell baby sitters and other caretakers or visitors about these safety precautions, and alert them to these prevention tips.

Post these "Poison Prevention Tips" as a reminder: prevention and preparation are your best protection against accidental poisoning.



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### What Do You Say?

#### THE POISON CONTROL CENTER OR EMERGENCY PERSONNEL MAY NEED TO KNOW THE FOLLOWING:

- name, address, phone number, and explanation of the immediate problem
- age and condition of the person involved in poisoning: choking, vomiting, skin warm or cold, conscious or unconscious
- what, when, and how much of the harmful substance was taken
- information on container label: name, dosage, number of tablets or capsules remaining compared with total number prescribed (ingredients, if household chemical)
- if possible, ingredients of the medicine (this information may be obtained later from your pharmacist)

#### Emergency Phone Numbers

Poison Control Center: 1-800-222-1222 (Your call will automatically be directed to your local Poison Control Center)

Emergency Assistance: \_\_\_\_\_

Police Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Fire Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital Emergency Department: \_\_\_\_\_

**Print this to record emergency phone numbers.**

### Act Calmly and Quickly

Prevention is the best way to reduce accidental poisonings. But, if a family member or friend is involved in an accidental poisoning, acting calmly and quickly is the best approach.

Poisoning can cause many physical reactions, from sleepiness to pneumonia, to organ damage, to death. It is necessary, therefore, to get help from health care providers who are familiar with medicines and poisonings, and the antidotes and treatments.

A call to the Poison Control Center 1-800-222-1222 or 911 service is the recommended way to get quick response which is your best chance to reduce the harmful effects of an accidental poisoning.

**Stay calm. Stay in control. Act quickly to get advice and treatment.**

