

Poison-proof your home

Information for Families

Your guide to keeping your family safe from poisons



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Ontario Centre
Poison Anti-Poison
Centre de l'Ontario

How to keep your family safe from poisons

Your home contains many items that can poison a child. You may not think that cleaners, medicines, plants and alcohol can be poisonous. But they can be very dangerous, even deadly, especially to children!

Poisonous products are often stored in places children can reach. Very young children are especially in danger of being poisoned. This is because they explore their world with their mouths. Young children do not know which items are safe to eat. It only takes a few seconds for a child to swallow a dangerous amount of a poisonous product that is not locked away.

This booklet will help you stop poisonings in your home. It tells you:

- what to do if you or your child are poisoned
- which products may be poisonous
- how to make your home safe

Remember, you can prevent poisonings!

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What to do if someone is poisoned

Be very careful not to taste, touch or breathe in the poison yourself.

If the person is not responding to you (unconscious), shaking and convulsing, or having trouble breathing or swallowing:

- Call 911 immediately.



For swallowed poisons:

If the person is awake:

- Give small sips of water.
- Call the poison centre.



For breathed in poisons:

If the person is awake:

- Take the person outside or into fresh air.
- Call the poison centre.



For poisons in the eye:

- Rinse the eye with lukewarm water for 15 minutes.
- Call the poison centre.



For poisons on the skin:

- Rinse the skin with lukewarm water for 15 minutes.
- Take off any clothing touched by the poison.
- Call the poison centre.

The most common types of poisons in the home

Many of the calls received by the poison centre are about children who have swallowed, touched, or breathed in one of these poisons:



Pain medicines

These medicines can be liquids or pills.

Examples of pain medicines are:

- Acetaminophen, such as Tempra® or Tylenol®
- ASA, such as Aspirin®
- Ibuprofen, such as Advil® or Motrin®



Household cleaners

These include bleach, dishwasher detergents, window cleaners, and oven cleaners.



Other prescription and non-prescription medicines

Examples of these medicines include sleeping pills, blood pressure medicines, medicines for anxiety and depression, vitamins, and allergy pills.



Cosmetics and personal care products

These products include lotions, perfumes, nail polish remover, toothpaste, mouthwash and deodorants.



Plants

Houseplants, garden plants, flowers and parts of vegetables can be poisonous. Berries can also be poisonous.



Cough and cold medicines

These medicines can be liquids or pills.



Alcohol

Alcoholic drinks such as beer, wine and liquor, as well as rubbing alcohol, can be poisonous to a young child.



Gasoline and other car products

These items, such as car oil, antifreeze, lock de-icer and windshield washer fluid, are often kept in the garage or basement.

Dangerous products inside the home

Medicine

All medicines can be dangerous to a child if the wrong amount or type is swallowed. This includes prescription and non-prescription medicines, herbal remedies, and vitamins.

How to take and give medicine safely

- Before you leave your doctor's office or pharmacy make sure you learn how to take or give the medicine.

Ask these questions:

- What is the right amount of medicine to be given or taken?
- How many times a day should this medicine be given or taken?
- When should this medicine be given or taken?
- For how many days should this medicine be given or taken?

- Do not take your medicine in front of children. They may try to copy you.
- Do not call medicine 'candy'. Do not make a game out of giving medicine to your child.
- Read the label carefully every time before you take medicine yourself or give medicine to your child.
- Medicine should be given by the same person each time so that double dosing does not happen. Double dosing is when someone gets two doses of the same medicine.



Put a light on when taking or giving medicine

- Do not take or give medicine in the dark.
- Do not give your child or yourself someone else's medicine.
- Be extra careful when your usual household routine is changed (e.g. during holidays, when visiting other people's homes, or when moving). During these times, it is easy for a parent to become distracted and for a child to get into a poison.

How to store medicine safely

- Ask your pharmacist to put all your prescription and non-prescription medicines in containers with child resistant caps. Remember that many children can open child resistant caps.
- Buy only the smallest amount of medicine that you need.
- Store all medicines in a locked cabinet or toolbox and out of your child's reach.



Keep track of how many pills are in a bottle

- Keep track of how many pills are in a bottle. You can do this by putting a piece of masking tape on the side of the bottle. Write on the masking tape how many pills are in the bottle. Each time you take a pill from the bottle, subtract it from the total number of pills.

- For medicines that need to be stored in the fridge, keep the medicine inside a plastic container. Put this container at the back of the fridge so your child cannot easily see or reach it.

- Always leave medicines in their original container.

- Do not mix different medicines, vitamins or other tablets in the same container.

- If you keep medicines in a purse or diaper bag, store them out of reach of your children. Remember that your children can get into your purse or diaper bag.

- Lock medicines away after every use.



How to throw away medicine

- Clean out your medicine cabinets.

Take out the following items:

- medicines that have expired, including pills, liquids or creams
- medicine that is not the right colour, or looks old
- crumbling pills
- unused portions of prescription medicines
- bottles or containers that do not have a label on them.



- Take old and leftover medicines to your pharmacist to throw away safely. Do not throw your medicines away in the garbage. Do not pour them down the sink or flush them down the toilet.

Watch for other dangerous products in the home



Cleaning products

- If you are using a cleaning product and are called away by the phone or doorbell, bring the cleaning product with you. Do not leave it where your child can get into it.
- Do not mix cleaning products together. They can create poisonous fumes that may hurt you when you breathe them in.



Paint

- If you are painting or spraying chemicals such as insecticides or oven cleaners in your home, make sure you are getting enough fresh air in the room. Open your windows and doors.

Lead

- Some older Canadian homes may have paint inside or outside the house that contains lead. Lead paint can poison children if they swallow peeling or loose paint or breathe in paint dust during renovations.

For more information about lead:

Effects of Lead on Human Health,

Health Canada website.

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/environ/lead-plomb-eng.php



Plants

- Some of your house and garden plants may be poisonous.
- Make sure you learn the names of all your plants and know which ones are poisonous.
- Move poisonous plants to places children cannot reach.
- Keep the tag that comes with new plants to help you remember their names.



Alcohol and cigarettes

- After a party, don't forget to empty all ashtrays and pour all unfinished alcoholic drinks down the drain.



How to store dangerous products

- Do not store food, medicines, and cleaning products in the same place. Store them in separate areas.
- Store your cleaning products locked and out of children's reach. Install safety latches on your cupboards.
- Keep all your cleaning products in the same containers they came in.
- Store personal care products, such as nail polish remover, mouthwash, toothpaste, and lotions in a locked cupboard.
- Store dangerous products such as paint, windshield washer fluid, antifreeze, and car oil in locked cabinets. Check areas in your home such as the garage, attic, laundry room and basement for these products.



How to throw away paint and other chemicals

- Do not pour unused paint or other chemicals down the drain. Call your local Public Works Department to find out how to dispose of unused paint.

Dangerous products outside of the home

Pesticides

All pesticides, including insecticides, herbicides and fungicides can be poisonous. Buy only as much as you need to do the work. Read and follow the instructions on the label to use, store, and dispose of these products safely.

How to use pesticides safely

- Make sure you wear protective clothing such as rubber gloves, rubber boots and goggles as directed on the label.
- Do not smoke, eat or drink when using pesticides.
- Do not use these products near children.
- Do not walk on grass that has been recently sprayed with chemicals.



How to store pesticides safely

- Store pesticides in a locked box or cabinet.

How to throw away pesticides

- Do not reuse empty pesticide containers.
- Do not pour insecticides and pesticides down the drain or bury them. They can be very dangerous to the environment. Call your local Public Works Department or Hazardous Waste Depot to ask how to throw away unused pesticides.

Look for these warning symbols

These symbols or pictures are put on the labels of products that can be dangerous. You will find them on the labels of many different products that you use in your home. The symbol shows a picture inside a frame. The picture tells you the type of danger.

Learn what each of these symbols mean, and read the labels of all your household products. If you see these symbols on them you know that they could be dangerous to your family.



Poison

This symbol means that the product could make you very sick or even die if it is swallowed or licked. Some products with this symbol can hurt you if you breathe them in.



Flammable

This symbol means that the product can catch fire quickly. Keep this product away from heat, flames and sparks.



Corrosive

This symbol means that the product can burn your skin or eyes. If it is swallowed, it will also hurt your throat and stomach.



Explosive

This symbol means that the product container will explode if it is heated or a hole is punched in it. If this happens, metal or plastic can fly out of the container and hurt your eyes or other parts of your body.

Your Safe Home Checklist

Use this guide to check your home for poisonous products.
Make sure you use and store them safely.



Kitchen

- cleaners
- vitamins
- medicines



Bathrooms

- cleaners
- cosmetics
- lotions
- vitamins
- medicines
- shampoo



Bedrooms

- cosmetics
- lotions
- perfumes
- medicines



Living areas

- plants
- alcoholic beverages
- flaking paint



Purse

- medicines
- cosmetics
- lotions



Garage

- antifreeze
- paint
- gasoline
- lock de-icer
- pesticides
- windshield washer fluid



Storage areas and closets

- other chemicals
- mothballs
- paint



Outdoors

- plants and mushrooms
- items in garden shed such as:
 - insecticides
 - herbicides
 - fungicides
 - fertilizers

If you want to reproduce this information, please ask us first.

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