

Prevention of childhood poisoning

Information for parents and caregivers



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In South Australia, every year, several hundred young children need medical care for poisoning from products generally found in and around the home. Commonly unintentional (accidental) poisonings occur in children younger than five, with children aged one to three at greatest risk. Across Australia unintentional poisoning is the second largest reason for hospital admission in young children under 5 years of age. Nationally, 1.9 times more children from rural and remote areas are admitted to hospital for unintentional poisoning, than children from metropolitan areas.

Why are children more likely to be poisoned?

- Young children are exploring their world and will put anything in their mouth.
- They also like to imitate what others do, including taking medications.
- They don't recognise dangerous products.
- At this age they are curious, but lack judgement and are unable to read.

What are the most common poisons taken by children?

- Medicines sold over the counter, such as paracetamol, cough and cold remedies, iron tablets, antihistamines and anti-inflammatory drugs.
- Prescription medicines, such as antidepressants, oral contraceptive pills, various heart tablets, narcotics, and analgesics.
- Other types of drugs, such as cannabis and cocaine.
- Other types of agents that can poison young children are:
 - Alcohol
 - Household products such as bleach, caustics, disinfectants, detergents, cleaning products, eucalyptus oil, vinegar, turpentine
 - Pesticides, including insecticides, rodenticides and herbicides
 - Perfumes and nail polish remover
 - Poisonous plants
 - Some toys, such as glow sticks, and more recently Bindeez toys containing Gamma-Hydroxybutyrate (GHB).

When are children most likely to be poisoned?

Poisoning can occur at any time, especially when things poisonous to young children are not kept out of reach, or locked away. This can sometimes happen when your normal routine changes. For example, medicine may be left out more often when someone in the home is sick. Unintentional poisonings can often occur when grandparents, who take medicines, visit and have the medicine in their bag; or the child goes to their grandparent's house and the grandparents aren't used to putting their medicines away.

Extra care is required when on holidays, moving house, having visitors, visiting other people, or during family problems.

How can you prevent your child being poisoned?

Check every room in your home for poisonous products and make sure they are moved to a safe storage area. It only takes a few minutes to check. If you are visiting, do a quick check for any poisonous products that need to be moved out of your child's way.

- Store medicines and chemicals out of sight and reach of children, at least 1.5 metres off the ground and in a locked child resistant container.
- Store medicines separately from chemicals and cleaners, but ensure they are all locked away.
- Use medicines and chemicals safely. Follow the given instructions and return them to safe storage immediately after use.
- Read the label carefully before giving any medicine, no matter how often you have given it before.
- Buy products in child resistant containers and use child resistant locks on cupboards or cabinets that store poisons. You can buy these at many hardware stores. However, remember child resistant is not child-proof – many toddlers can open them given enough time.
- Ensure all products are stored in original containers and are clearly labelled.
- Regularly dispose of unwanted and out of date medicines by taking them to your nearest pharmacy for safe disposal.
- Some children's medicines need to be kept in the refrigerator – use a small portable lockable container for safe storage.
- Don't call medicines 'lollies' or 'sweeties'.



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- Check that the plants in the garden are not poisonous. You can check with your local nursery, or look at the website of the Australian National Botanic Gardens for information about poisonous plants www.anbg.gov.au/poison-plants/index.html.
- Keep your guests handbags out of reach of your child.
- Always keep the Poisons Information Centre phone number 13 11 26 near your phone, or program it into the phone for speed dialling.

When should you ring the Poisons Information Centre?

- You should ring the Poisons Information Centre immediately if your child has swallowed something you think might be poisonous. This includes situations in which a wrong medicine, or wrong dose has been given. Do not wait for symptoms to occur. Always check with the Poisons Information Centre if you are not sure.

In an emergency

- If your child swallows something poisonous, do not try to make them vomit.
- Pick up the container, along with the child, and take them both to the phone.
- Ring the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 (Australia-wide, 24 hours a day). They will advise you what to do.

For more information, contact:

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