



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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National Poison Prevention Week March 15-21, 2009

(Omaha, NE) – National Poison Prevention Week helps raise awareness about the dangers of poison exposure. Much progress has been made since the first National Poison Prevention Week in 1962, yet poisonings remain a threat to the safety and health of all Americans. More than 2 million poisonings are reported each year to the 61 Poison Centers across the US and approximately 1 million of those are children under the age of 5. Over 50 percent of poisonings involve children but the majority of fatalities occur among adults, especially older adults.

One call to the Nebraska Regional Poison Center can provide quick, reliable and free assistance in dealing with possible poisonings at any time of the day or night, often without a costly trip to the doctor's office or emergency room. The specially trained nurses also can identify situations that are too serious to handle at home and may require emergency medical attention.

During National Poison Prevention Week 2009, being celebrated this year between March 15-21, the Nebraska Regional Poison Center wants to remind people living in Nebraska about the benefits – both medical and financial – of calling the poison center first when you suspect someone has been exposed to a poison.

Realizing that someone has been exposed to a poison is scary, but it doesn't always mean that person's life is in danger or that they need to see a doctor right away, said Joan McVoy, RN, CSPI.

For example, parents often panic when they believe a child has ingested bleach. The product label makes it appear as though one swallow of bleach is deadly and they will call 911 or rush them to the emergency room. But in reality, ingesting small amounts of bleach will usually only irritate the digestive system. In many cases, poison center staff will give home treatment advice and instruct parents to watch the child at home.

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“In general, about 75 percent of poisoning exposure calls that we receive are treated safely at home,” McVoy said. “That means when a person calls the poison center, they are often saving money by not going to an emergency room or physician’s office.”

In fact, in 2008 alone, the Nebraska Regional Poison Center estimated that its services saved patients about \$22 million in healthcare costs. As the poison center’s call volume increases more money is saved each year by the consumer which makes the poison center services invaluable.

In the early 1960s, when National Poison Prevention Week started, more than 450 kids died each year because of accidental poisonings. Now, that number is down to less than 30. Last year alone, the Nebraska Regional Poison Center logged 40,961 calls regarding accidental poisonings. That’s an increase of almost 3,000 calls in just the last 2 years.

Because poisonings often happen while adults are distracted, experts emphasize three strategies to reduce deaths and injuries from poisonings:

- Keep medicines and household chemicals locked up, out of reach and out of sight of young children at all times.
- Use child-resistant packaging because it saves lives. But remember that child-resistant doesn’t mean childproof.
- Call a poison center to get immediate treatment advice for poison emergencies.

The Nebraska Regional Poison Center offers tips on poison prevention as a free community service. For more information, contact the Nebraska Regional Poison Center by calling (402) 955-5555 in the Omaha metropolitan area or toll-free at 1-800-222-1222.

The Nebraska Regional Poison Center is sponsored by The Nebraska Medical Center and University of Nebraska Medical Center.