



## Nebraska Regional Poison Center Newsletter

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### Poison Centers Ready to Handle Your Medicine Mistakes

One of the common misconceptions surrounding poison centers is that they are aimed primarily at children who've gotten into something they shouldn't have. While poison centers do take such calls, they also take plenty of calls from people who've made mistakes when taking their medicine. In 2008, 10.6 percent of all poison exposures occurred as a result of "therapeutic errors," including taking the wrong medicine or inadvertently taking doses too close together.

The Nebraska Regional Poison Center offers the following tips aimed at taking medicine safely:

- Never take medicine that isn't intended for you, and never give a person medicine not intended



for them. Do not use another person's prescription, even if it is similar to one you may be taking.

- Do not give a child medicine or vitamins intended for adults.
  - Never use a household spoon to measure liquids because the volume in such a spoon could vary widely and the dose would not be accurate.
- Make sure after refilling a prescription that the pills look the same as the previous month, and that there is a child-resistant closure on the bottle. If the directions are not clear or appear to

have changed, ask the pharmacist or your doctor as soon as you notice it. If side effects occur when taking medicine, call your doctor or pharmacist to check and see if you should stop the drug.

- Some drugs include warnings that they should not be taken with certain drugs, supplements, foods or alcohol. Be sure you know if this applies to your medicines.
- Never take medicine in the dark, and use glasses or a magnifier to read the label if necessary before taking each dose. Some poison exposures occur when people accidentally take medicine intended for their pets, or used ear drops in their eyes, or inhaled a spray product intended for the nose.
- Store all medicines out of the sight of teens and others who may try to take them out of curiosity or for abuse purposes. If there are strong pain killers or other potent drugs in the home, consider locking them up separately from other medicines.
- Maintain an up-to-date list of all medicines for each family member, including prescription and over-the-counter drugs, as well as supplements. Show the list to your doctor at clinic visits, and verify each time you go to the pharmacy for refills or buy a new medicine. Be sure you have any allergies listed as well. Having this information when you travel is also very important.
- When using medicine administered by a “patch,” take off one patch before applying the next one. In the case of topical products, wash off the skin before applying more.
- Don't flush old medicines down the toilet. Instead, hold them for a local medication disposal event, or mix them with an inedible substance like coffee grounds or kitty litter, then dispose of them in a sealed bag or other container in the trash. If you are worried or have a question about how to take medicine safely, call the poison center at 1-800-222-1222.

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## Keeping Your Garden Poison-Free

The frost is gone, the flowers are blooming, it's time to put away the snow shovel and dust off the gardening shovel instead.

With the ushering in of the beautiful weather, we set our sights on spring gardening.

But even this relaxing hobby has its dangers. The Nebraska Regional Poison Center offers the following



tips to keep gardeners out in the yard rather than in the emergency room during spring planting season:

- Be cautious when spraying pesticides and other chemicals. Many are toxic if ingested, and even prolonged skin contact or inhalation during use of product can cause toxic symptoms. Symptoms of pesticide poisoning may include irritation of the skin, eyes and lungs, as well as muscle cramps, vomiting, diarrhea and sweating. If you experience these symptoms, call the poison center at 1-800-222-1222 for assistance.
- Pay attention to what you're putting in your garden. Weeds such as nightshade and nettles often co-exist with planted flowers and shrubs, and can be harmful. Signs of plant poisoning include symptoms ranging from skin irritation to nausea to hallucinations. Some plants when ingested can be toxic to the heart, liver, kidney, stomach and can cause seizures.
- While products may note that they are "green," "natural" or "organic," these are terms that are used interchangeably and don't necessarily mean the products are harmless. Regardless of the product, make sure you carefully read the label information before using it.
- Keep pesticides, fertilizers and other gardening chemicals in their original containers, and out of the sight and reach of children.
- Do not apply pesticides on a windy day or in children's sand boxes.
- Wash hands after contact with any chemical.
- Store seeds, bulbs and plant food out of the reach of children; some seeds and bulbs can be coated with insecticides.
- Consider all mushrooms found outside unsafe.
- Call the poison center at 1-800-222-1222 immediately if you suspect a child has touched, breathed or swallowed pesticide, fertilizer or parts of a plant.

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## Tips for Safe Housecleaning



Now that the weather's nicer, it's much easier to open the windows, let the sun shine in and get rid of the dirt that built up over a long, dismal winter.

It's time to sweep up the dust from the prior year, pack away those fuzzy sweaters and sort through cluttered closets and drawers.

Believe it or not, this routine is not without dangers. About 90 percent of poison exposures occur at home, and more than

50 percent of those exposures affect children under the age of five.

Household cleaning products are consistently among the top five products that spur calls to poison centers regarding children five or under. In 2008, only analgesics, or painkillers, and cosmetic products spurred more calls to poison centers regarding children five or under. Household products accounted for nearly 10 percent of all poison exposures in this age group.

Adults need to be careful as well. In 2008, household cleaning products accounted for eight percent of the calls to poison centers regarding people 20 or older.

The Nebraska Regional Poison Center offers the following tips for spring cleaning safely.

- Do not leave children unattended near a cleaning product.
- Keep all cleaning products locked away and out of reach of young children.
- Never mix cleaning products. Doing so may create toxic fumes. Use only one cleaning product at a time.
- Store cleaning products in their original containers and not in empty food containers or bottles.
- Always read the label instructions to determine how to safely use the product.
- Keep the toll-free poison center phone number 1-800-222-1222 near your phone in case of an accidental exposure.
- Call the poison center immediately if you suspect a child has touched, breathed or swallowed a cleaning product. Calls to 1-800-222-1222 are automatically connected to a specialist in poison information who is a nurse, pharmacist or doctor offering free, expert, confidential advice. The specialist in poison information will tell you exactly what to do and will follow-up with you by phone, if necessary, to provide further assurance.
- If you believe you've been exposed to a poison or have questions about whether a substance is poisonous, call the poison center at 1 (800) 222-1222.

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## A Few Tips on Avoiding a Toxic Workplace

While the vast majority of poison exposures occur in the home, the workplace, despite its sometimes bland and sterile environment, has its own risks.

It's easy to take for granted dangers in the office, particularly when focused on getting a job done. But in 2008, 1.75 percent of all poison exposures reported to poison centers occurred in the workplace – putting workplaces a distant second to homes as sites where poison exposures

occurred.

The Nebraska Regional Poison Center wants to reduce poisonings in every setting, including the office. It offers the following tips aimed at keeping the office poison-free:

- Be careful when handling laser printer cartridges. A poison exposure can occur when laser printer cartridge ink is spilt. Fumes, dust or ozone from the cartridges can be dangerous if inhaled.
- Fluorescent light bulbs contain silica or mercury and should be handled and replaced by professionals. The same goes for energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs, or CFL bulbs.
- Beware the lunchroom, and particularly the office refrigerator. Foods stored in the company break or lunch room refrigerator can be outdated, leaving the potential for food poisoning.
- Office supplies such as keyboard cleaners, markers, glues or white-out help to get the job done, but can be misused if inhaled. Make sure these key office supplies are used for their intended purpose.
- Don't treat air fresheners in the bathrooms or other workplace cleaning supplies casually. Mixing or handling such products improperly can cause irritation to the skin or breathing difficulties.
- The same dangers present in the household are also a danger in the workplace. Read labels and use caution when taking over-the-counter or prescription medications, particular if handling potentially dangerous equipment or instruments on the job.
- Be wary of bugs. The Brown Recluse spider can be found in old stored boxes or in unused files, old file cabinets or drawers and under unmoved furniture or old carpet.

The Nebraska Regional Poison Center offers confidential services 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is free to the public. If you believe you've been exposed to a poison or have questions about whether a substance is poisonous, call the Nebraska Regional Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222. The nurses are ready to answer all your questions. Besides answering your poison questions the nurses will be happy to send you printed materials for yourself or for any outreach education you have planned.