



## Nebraska Regional Poison Center Newsletter

April 2010      Volume 1, Issue 1      [www.nebraskapoisson.com](http://www.nebraskapoisson.com)

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### A Few “Green” Ways to Prevent Poisoning

These days it's hip to be green, but even though being green is good for the environment, the products we use to embrace an environmentally-friendly lifestyle aren't always fit for ingestion, skin contact or inhalation.

Just as special care must be taken when handling harsh chemical cleaners and household products, so must care be taken when dealing with their earth-friendlier alternatives.

This becomes particularly important in spring, when the garden – and its eventual fruits – become part of a more environmentally-friendly lifestyle.

The Nebraska Regional Poison Center offers the following tips for those who want to save the world and keep themselves safe in the process:

- Pay attention to what you're growing. The tomato plants that you are getting ready to put into the ground will be a tasty addition to the summer, but other plants in your garden may be hazardous. Make sure you know what's in your garden, and what could be toxic. Consult your poison center to help identify potentially harmful plants, and be sure to consider weeds, because nightshade and nettles often co-exist with planted flowers and shrubs. Signs of plant poisoning include symptoms ranging from skin irritation to nausea to hallucinations.
- Even if the green cleaning agents you buy are advertised as non-toxic, make sure you store and use them safely. Mixing household cleaners can create hazardous fumes, and some ingredients like



boric acid and alcohol found in “green” cleaners can be extremely toxic, and should be used with caution. Some green cleaners may already exist in your pantry – vinegar, baking soda, salt, mineral oil and cornstarch could be used for everything from floors to windows to freshening the air.

- Believe it or not, it’s possible to make killing pests a greener process. Consider stale beer to get rid of slugs or tuna fish oil to attract earwigs. Onion and garlic extracts combined with dish soap might be effective in getting rid of insects, and diatomaceous earth is safe and effective against ants, ticks, bedbugs and earwigs. Insecticidal soaps, meanwhile, can kill soft-bodied insects on contact.
  - Sometimes you might want to get rid of the green. Consider a vinegar/water mixture to get rid of moss.
  - Remember that while green, natural and organic are terms that are used interchangeably, that doesn’t necessarily mean the products are harmless. Regardless of the product, make sure you carefully read label information before using any green product. 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.
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## Tweens and Inhalants: A Danger You Should Be Aware of

For most parents, the idea of child-proofing ends once the child gets old enough to walk and talk.

But the need for child-proofing lasts even past the age when your child can go to a middle-school dance, play a school sport or babysit other children.

By the time your child becomes a teenager, poison dangers aren’t as straightforward as keeping the cleaning supplies locked up. Drug abuse becomes a danger, and the substances in your home that you rarely think twice about can become lethal drugs to your “tween” or teenager.



Poison centers refer to inhalant abuse as “the silent epidemic” because most people do not know about the dangers of inhalants and abuse often goes unnoticed. The Nebraska Regional Poison Center wants you to be aware of these dangers, and offers the following tips aimed at preventing inhalants from becoming an epidemic that infects your home.

- Inhalants can be found in homes, schools and offices. More than 1,000 products can be inhaled for intoxicating effects. They are available, low cost and in legal products rarely thought of as poisonous. First, be aware that they exist.

- Common inhalants include gasoline products, paint remover, glue, “White-Out” correction fluid, markers, spray paints, room deodorizers and whipped cream dispensers.
- Inhalants provide an immediate “high” that can last 1 to 5 minutes, sometimes longer. The effect is similar to drinking too much alcohol and causes mind altering effects. Tell your children that they can be lethal. Abuse of inhalants can cause “sudden sniffing death” even the first time inhalants are used. They can lead to irregular rhythms in the heart, which in turn may lead to cardiac arrest. Inhalant abuse can cause suffocation by interfering with breathing or a person could choke. Long term inhalant abuse may cause the loss of normal function in arms, legs and loss of bladder and bowel control. Inhalants destroy brain cells. Finally, most of these chemicals are fire hazards and could cause a fire or an explosion.
- Signs that your child may be using inhalants include a drunk, dazed appearance, chemical smells on the breath, body or clothing, red eyes, runny noses or nose bleeds, personality changes, slurred speech, and an unusually large collection of paint, spray cans, room deodorizers or other inhalant products.
- Talk to your kids about inhalant abuse. Tell them inhalants are poison and do not belong in the body, but don't teach them how to abuse inhalants or show them which products to use. Talk about their “toxic effects,” instead of “getting high.” And don't call them inhalants – call them chemicals or toxins. Not talking to your kids about inhalants could be a fatal mistake.

For more information about inhalant abuse call the Nebraska Regional Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 or contact the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition at [www.inhalants.org](http://www.inhalants.org).

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## Synthetic Marijuana Products Spur Concern Among Poison Centers

Doctors and clinicians at U.S. poison centers say that a synthetic version of marijuana that is frequently sold as incense has spurred symptoms including a fast heart rate, confusion and nausea.

An herbal marijuana substitute known by names including “Spice,” and “K2,” sprayed with a synthetic marijuana-like drug, has spurred at least 112 calls to U.S. poison centers since 2009, including 59 calls since March 1, 2010.

Poison centers in Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Wyoming have been among those reporting calls



regarding synthetic marijuana.

Among the states that have seen the highest number of calls: Missouri, which Missouri Poison Center Medical Director Anthony Scalzo says has received approximately 40 calls about the substance since last November. In response to the calls, the state of Missouri issued a health alert about the products, and the St. Charles County Council recently passed an emergency ordinance banning the sale of such products, which are sold in gas stations, convenience stores and "head shops." Scalzo said the reactions being reported – including agitation, anxiety, an extremely fast, racing heartbeat and elevated blood pressure – are the opposite of what would be expected from marijuana, which is a source of concern. "This is not what we'd expect from these compounds," he said.

The product is marketed as incense or potpourri and has been sold since 2006 for about \$30 to \$40 per three-gram bag. Scalzo said parents should be on the lookout for what looks like incense in their child's room and watch to see if their children seem more anxious than usual.

No deaths have been reported, but symptoms have also included agitation, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, tremors and chest pain in some cases.

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## Nebraska Regional Poison Center: The Best Health Care Deal Around

The health care debate has spurred a lot of conversation about the high cost of medical care. You may not know that your poison center is the best health care bargain around.



Calling a poison center is free to the public and confidential. You can call your poison center for questions such as: Is it safe to take certain medications together? Or: Is the cleaning product my child just touched safe for kids?

Most poison exposures can be treated successfully at home, without a costly emergency room visit. Studies indicate that every dollar spent on a poison center saves at least \$7. And patients who do need to be treated in a health care center stay a median of 3.5 days when they call a poison center, compared to 6.5 days when they do not.

If you have a question about poison, call your poison center at 1-800-222-1222.

This newsletter is brought to you by the Nebraska Regional Poison Center and was produced with assistance from the American Association of Poison Control Centers.

When you dial 1-800-222-1222, your call is answered by a medical professional with special training in poison management. Help is fast, free to the public, confidential and available 24 hours a day, every day.