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To: ALL HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS
From: The Poison Center Education Team
Subject: Update on Chelonitoxism
Date: April 2023

Chelonitoxism

Chelonitoxism is a food poisoning that has been associated with marine turtles including green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), and Leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*). It is said that the cause of this type of poisoning is from turtles ingesting toxic algae that then accumulate in the tissues of the turtle. The contaminated turtles appear healthy and do not show signs of illness.

Often, poisonings happen in a mass outbreak as the consumption of turtles is often related to a group celebration. Children are the most susceptible to this type of poisoning although everyone, including pets, who consume the contaminated turtle would be at risk. Chelonitoxin food poisoning has been documented to pass to children through breastmilk. Cooking turtle meat does not destroy the toxin, all parts of the turtle are potentially toxic.

Symptoms of chelonitoxin poisoning may start as gastrointestinal issues and include abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, also itching and pain in the mouth and throat have been noted. Serious neurologic symptoms include confusion, seizures, paralysis, coma and potentially death. Diagnosis is often a challenge because the signs and symptoms will resemble other types of food poisoning.

Treatment measures include symptomatic and supportive cares such as intravenous fluids, electrolyte replacement, and respiratory support. There is no known antidote.

In American Samoa, health care professionals and the public can reach the Poison Center by calling 1-800-222-1222. You can speak to a Registered Nurse Specialist immediately 24/7/365.