

FACT SHEET

TAKE ACTION TODAY, PUT THEM AWAY

A major pilot programme to promote awareness and prevent accidents with household cleaning products

Who is most at risk?

Every year, thousands of infants need medical care for poisoning from products commonly found in and around the home. Whilst long term injury is rare the anxiety and distress caused to both child and parents could be avoided by increased awareness.

- Most accidental poisoning happens to children younger than five years old, with children aged one to three year being most at risk
- On average, 15 under-fives are admitted to hospital each day due to suspected poisoning from all sources
- Children from the poorest families are three times more likely to be admitted to hospital due to an accident, including accidental poisoning

Why are young children more likely to be poisoned?

- Exploring is part of growing up but young children have little concept of potential dangers
- They are inquisitive and will often put things in their mouth to further explore their texture and taste
- Part of growing up is to watch and copy what other do, unfortunately this includes copying using potentially dangerous things like household products and medication
- Small children may mistake liquid capsule style dishwasher and washing machine detergents for toys or sweets. These are not only a danger in relation to ingestion but can also cause serious irritation to the eyes.

What can be poisonous to a child?

- Cleaning products
- Laundry detergents and sprays
- Solvents
- Medicines
- Electronic cigarettes and their liquid refills
- Button batteries
- Alcohol
- Plants
- Gardening products
- Many other products in and around the home.

When do poisonings happen?

Poisoning can happen at any time of the day but more so:

- When products are left within the reach of an inquisitive child
- When a routine is changed or there are major changes within the family
- Children are in a different environment such as visiting friends and relatives
- Adult's attention is taken away for a short while
- Through simple mistakes of transferring products into a different container.

How can these accidents be prevented?

Household Cleaning Products

The kitchen and the bathroom are the likeliest places for accidental poisonings from cleaning products.

- Closely supervise children in and around the home if you are using cleaning products
- Keep household chemicals out of sight and reach of children, preferably in a locked cupboard. Remember this also applies to the garage and shed
- Always store household cleaning chemicals in their original containers
- Replace lids and put all products away immediately after use
- Dispose of unwanted household cleaning products safely
- Store household cleaning products in a different place from food and medicine
- Use household cleaning products according to label directions
- Mixing household products can cause dangerous gases to form.

Medications

- Wherever possible, buy products in child resistant containers
- Keep all medications out of sight and reach of children, preferably in a locked cupboard
- Dispose of unwanted medication safely
- Replace lids and put away immediately after use
- Avoid keeping medication in handbags.

Other Poisoning Risks

- Ensure that gas appliances and heaters are checked and serviced regularly
- Always keep electronic cigarettes out of the reach of children as the vapour contains nicotine, which if swallowed, can be fatal. Liquid refills are also extremely toxic
- Button batteries can be found in toys, remote controls and small electronic devices but if swallowed, they can leak acid into the body with fatal results. Dispose of button batteries safely and keep them out of the reach of children
- Avoid buying plants with poisonous leaves or berries or those that can irritate the skin
- Keep garden and decorating chemicals out of the reach of children
- Never decant chemicals into other containers, particularly drinks bottles.

- Have chimneys and flues checked regularly to make sure they are not blocked

Symptoms

Symptoms associated with serious poisoning include:

- being sick
- abdominal pain
- drowsiness or reduced levels of consciousness
- breathing difficulties
- seizures (fits)

First Aid

If you think someone has swallowed poison:

- Get medical help immediately
- Do not let the child drink anything
- Do not make the child sick this can cause more damage
- If you know what has been taken keep a sample to show to the medical services
- If they appear to be unconscious, try to wake them and encourage them to spit out any pills
- If a child's lips are burned by corrosive substances, frequent sips of cold water or milk may be given
- Residual chemicals on the skin should be rinsed away with copious amounts of water

Medical staff will need to take a detailed history to effectively treat a person who has been poisoned. When the paramedics arrive or when you arrive at an emergency department, give them as much information as you can, including:

- What substances you think the person may have swallowed
- When the substance was taken (how long ago)
- Why the substance was taken – whether it was an accident or deliberate
- How it was taken (for example, swallowed)
- How much was taken (if you know)
- Give details of any symptoms that the person has had, such as whether they have been sick.

Child Resistant Containers

These have helped to reduce the incidence of poisoning but it must be remembered that these are not child proof they simply delay the child from getting the product as quickly. Children as young as three can open them in seconds. It is still therefore important not to rely on child resistant packaging and to keep these products out of reach of children.

Where can I find further information?

A video and information is on the Keep Caps From Kids website, set up by the detergent industry to promote the safe use of liquid laundry detergent capsules in Europe at www.keepcapsfromkids.eu/uk

The RoSPA website has advice on poisoning risks to children in the home at www.rospa.com/homesafety/adviceandinformation/childsafety/

The NHS has advice at www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Poisoning/Pages/treatment.aspx