

# 11,000 treated for accidental poisoning last year

572 of poisoning cases involved children

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**MORE than \$27 million was spent last year to treat 11,000 cases of accidental poisoning, according to the health ministry. According to the ministry, 572 of the poison cases involved children under five years of age.**

"Poisoning poses a serious threat to health and safety, especially to our children who are the most vulnerable and often the victims of these unintentional accidents," said Dr Elizabeth Ward, director of disease prevention and control at the Ministry of Health.

She was speaking at the opening of the second Scientific Conference of the Caribbean Poison Information Network (CARPIN) at the Knutsford Court Hotel last Saturday.

Dr Ward said that in 2005, 411 or 82 per cent of accidental poisoning cases occurred in children under five years, with 367 of them being two years and under.

According to the health ministry, bleach remained the number one substance in accidental poisoning, especially among children under five.

A further breakdown of the figures showed that over a five-year period, from 2001 to 2005, four substances - bleach, kerosene, pharmaceuticals and pesticides - accounted for more than 80 per cent of accidental poisoning. But while the percentage has varied over the years, bleach has remained the leading causative agent of accidental poisoning on all occasions.

Bleach is commonly used as a disinfectant in the home, but in some cases the substance is used improperly and this results in accidental poisoning. Another common but dangerous practice is to pour bleach into a container that is used to store drinks, which can result in accidental poisoning.

Dr Ward said while the figures for both years showed a declining trend in poisoning, children remain at high risk in the home as they often consume bleach and other toxic substances left in soft drink bottles, water bottles or cups.