



## **Poison Prevention in the Home and its Environs**

### **POISONOUS SUBSTANCES**

❖ COSMETICS, MEDICATIONS

❖ CLEANING AGENTS

❖ PESTICIDE,  
PETROLEUM PRODUCTS,  
CLEANING AGENTS  
PAINT PRODUCTS  
HERBICIDES  
RODENTICIDES

❖ PLANTS

### **LOCATION**

BEDROOM,  
BATHROOM,  
MOTOR VEHICLE

KITCHEN,  
BATHROOM  
LIVING ROOM

GARAGE  
KITCHEN  
LAUNDRY ROOM

YARD,  
FLOWER POTS  
THE FIELD

## **FACT SHEET- BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT POISONS AND POISONINGS**

### **What is a poison?**

One definition of a poison is: 'a substance that when introduced into or absorbed by a living organism may destroy life or injure health.'

### **About Poisons**

There are various household substances that are poisonous. These include:

- Cleaning and washing products such as bleach, which can be harmful in small amounts.
- Medicines, which may be safe at the recommended dose, but poisonous if taken in overdoses.
- Other household chemicals, such as plant food, paints, solvents, firelighters, etc.
- Some toiletries such as hair dyes and other hair treatments
- Petrol and kerosene
- Some foods and plants

Children are the main victims of poison incidents in Jamaica and many other countries. Most of the accidental cases of poisonings in children occur in the home. In 2004, eighty- five (85%) of the reported cases of poisonings in Jamaica were children while in the United States, children accounted for seventy- one percent (71%). More than fifty percent (50%) of the documented cases in Barbados were children less than five years old while in East Surinam it was eighty-two percent (82%).

### **What can happen if someone gets poisoned?**

In some cases the effects are minimal and no medical follow-up may be required. However in many poisoning situations major effects and even death will occur. Some of these major effects include liver failure, kidney failure, respiratory failure, etc.

### **What are common agents/ products causing poisonings? (IN Jamaica and other Caribbean Countries)**

- Bleach is the most common substance in Jamaica
- Kerosene
- Pharmaceuticals e.g. analgesics, psychoactive drugs, benzodiazepines
- Pesticides and herbicides.
- Other Household chemicals such as floor polish, disinfectants, caustic soda and air fresheners.
- Other solvents e.g. thinner and acetone
- Others including: personal care products, car/ engine products, adhesives, sulphur, recreational drugs, lead, battery acid, flower seeds and organic phosphate.
- Food poisonings e.g. ciguatera toxin

***NB: The agents are listed in order of most common too least common in descending order.***

### **What should be done to prevent poisonings?**

- Increasing public awareness and education
- Keep all hazardous material and drugs in locked cupboards and out of reach of children.
- Ensure safety latches and drawers are placed on cupboards where potential poisons may be stored.
- Store all medicine and household chemicals in their original containers with proper labels.
- When possible buy products in child-resistant packaging.
- Read carefully the labels on different products that can be potential poisons
- Never refer to a drug as candy to children.
- Do not store food and chemicals in the same cupboard.
- Never store dangerous products in everyday containers such as milk bottles, soda bottles or drinking glasses.
- Check the garden for poisonous plants or berries and remove them.
- Teach children to always ask before eating or drinking anything.
- Always keep a keen eye on children and always have the Poison Center number handy in case of accidental poisonings.

### **Symptoms of Poisonings**

Different poisons affect the body differently: they can take effect quickly. The range of symptoms is very broad. If someone becomes very ill without an apparent reason, poisoning should be considered and a possible cause. Common symptoms of poisonings can include:

- Abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, or nausea
- Dizziness, weakness or drowsiness
- Fever
- Chills (shivering)
- Loss of appetite
- Headache or irritability
- Pain on swallowing or production of more saliva than usual
- Skin rash
- Burns around the nose or mouth
- Double or blurred vision
- Seizures (fits)
- Unconsciousness

### **What do I do if someone is poisoned?**

***Remember poisonings can be a life-threatening situation, however the following are some immediate measure you can take in the event that poisoning occurs:***

- If you suspect someone has swallowed a poisonous substance try to identify the substance so as to help the medical staff give appropriate treatment quickly.
- If it is safe to so, immediately remove the person from the source of exposure and if possible remove the substance from the person.
- Immediately go to the nearest medical facility
- Be prepared to supply the following information to a medical professional or the member of the medical staff:
  1. The name of the substance swallowed; if possible, keep the container and a note of how much has been consumed.
  2. The person's age and estimated weight.
  3. The estimated time that the poison was swallowed
  4. Whether or not the person has vomited
  5. Whether the person suffers from any chronic illness.
- If you suspect that someone has inhaled poisonous fumes, you need to first assess the situation and your risk, then you can follow these guidelines:
  1. If possible, remove the person from the contaminated area.
  2. Avoid inhaling fumes yourself by taking deep breaths before entering the area and holding your breath until you are clear of the area.
  3. Once out of the area of exposure, check to see if the person's airway is clear and if he/she is breathing.
  4. If the person is not breathing, begin **CPR only if you know how to do so.**
  5. Call for assistance and immediately take the person to the nearest medical facility.
- Call the Poison Center at 1-888-POISONS for additional information.