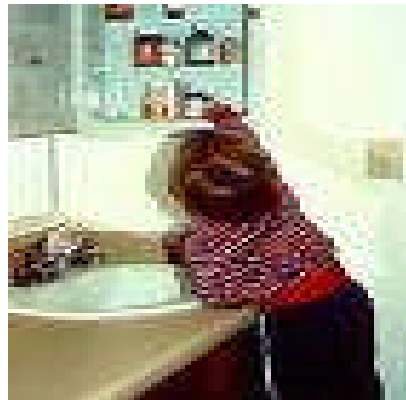


Safeguarding your Children against Household Poisons

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According to the surveillance unit of the Ministry of Health, 495 cases of accidental poisoning were reported in 2007 of which 75% occurred in children under the age of five and 64% were children 2 years old and younger. Children, particularly those under five years old learn by exploring their environment. Unfortunately, most of what they grasp end up in their mouths; it is therefore no surprise that children in this age group are more susceptible to poisoning.



Poisonous Household Substances

There are many potential poisonous substances used around the home. Bleach has been found to be the most common agent implicated in poisoning followed by pesticides. Combined with pharmaceuticals and kerosene, these agents account for 74% of all cases of accidental poisoning reported to the surveillance unit of the Ministry of Health in 2007. Babies in their crawling stage may encounter these substances in unsecured cupboards such as under the kitchen sink or in corners on the ground.

Substances hazardous in the hands of a child include:

- + Bleach
- + Detergents
- + Floor polish
- + Drain cleaners
- + Paints
- + Paint thinners
- + Insecticides
- + Pesticides
- + Herbicides
- + Kerosene
- + Toilet bowl cleaners
- + Other cleaning agents
- + Other chemicals

When they become toddlers, children can climb up on chairs and reach for higher cupboards and dressers, get into bags left on beds and so may have access to items such as:



- + Nail polish
- + Nail polish removers
- + Perfumes
- + Vitamins
- + Iron tablets
- + Medication
- + Contraceptives
- + Alcohol
- + Face products
- + Lotions
- + Hobby chemicals such as those used in photography

Remember that a child does not have to swallow a substance to be poisoned. Some agents are harmful if inhaled or rubbed on the skin; neither does a substance have to taste good for it to be eaten by a child.

Tips to Prevent Poisoning in Children

Since most cases of poisoning are accidental, the key is to be aware of those substances around the home that can be potentially poisonous for children and be vigilant in preventing access to them.

- ✓ Keep all medication and household agents out of the reach of children, preferably in a locked cupboard.
- ✓ Keep all medication in their original containers and read the label each time before administering.
- ✓ Close child-resistant containers properly. Child-resistant does not mean that the bottle is child-proof. Some children can still find ways to open these bottles, so be careful to keep these bottles out of reach.
- ✓ Avoid taking medication in front of children as children tend to imitate what they see.
- ✓ Do not store chemicals in drink bottles or food containers. Clear substances such as paint thinners or bleach poured into rum labeled bottles can be hazardous for everyone in the household.
- ✓ Be aware of look-alike substances such as colourful pills and candies, liquid medication and juices, chemical bottles and juice bottles.
- ✓ Use the word “medication” and not candy or sweets to your children.
- ✓ Dispose properly of expired drugs, old chemicals and chemical containers.
- ✓ When using products, do not leave them unattended, this could be when the child gets access to them.
- ✓ Pour substances away from the label so the moisture will not smudge the writing.
- ✓ Store household products separately from food items.
- ✓ Keep an emergency medical number next to each telephone.

In Case of Suspected Poisoning

If case your child has been exposed to a poison, get medical attention right away. If the agent ingested is caustic such as bleach or toilet bowl cleaner, or is a petroleum product such as kerosene or gasoline, DO NOT INDUCE VOMITTING, you can give lots of water to dilute the chemical. Likewise, if you are unsure of what was ingested, do not induce vomiting.

With an awareness of the potential poisons in your environment and vigilant measures in place to minimize the likelihood of your child being exposed to poisons, accidental poisoning can be prevented.

Call:
Caribbean Poison Information Network
(CARPIN)
Tel: 977-7777; Toll free: 1-888-POISONS
764-7667