

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 are placed on cupboards and drawers 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.

What do I do if someone is poisoned?

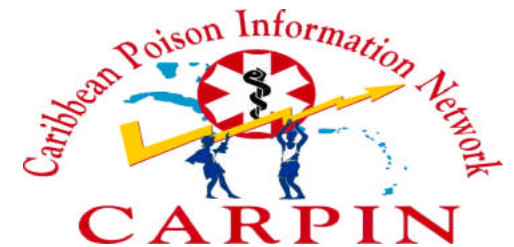
Remember poisonings can be a life-threatening situation, however the following are some immediate measures you can take in the event that poisoning occurs:

- If it is safe to do so, immediately remove the person from the source of exposure and if possible remove the substance from the person e.g. removing clothing.
- Immediately go to the nearest medical facility Be prepared to supply the following information to a member of the medical staff: e.g. a Doctor or Nurse
 - The name of the substance swallowed; if possible, keep the container and a note of how much has been consumed.
 - The person's age and estimated weight.
 - The estimated time that the poison was swallowed
 - Whether or not the person has vomited
 - 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:
 - If possible, remove the person from the contaminated area.
 - Avoid inhaling fumes yourself by taking deep breaths before entering the area and holding your breath until you are clear of the area.

Once out of the area of exposure, check to see if the person's airway is clear and if he/she is breathing. If the person is not breathing, begin CPR only if you know how to do so.



A guide to Poison Prevention and Treatment for Nurses



• **Preventing poisoning, protecting lives....**

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.'

Poisons around the home

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 e.g. Barracuda and Oleander

Who gets poisoned ?

Any one can be poisoned even pets, however, 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%).



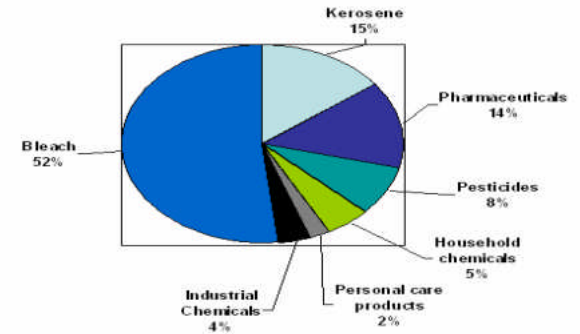
What can happen if someone gets poisoned?

In some cases the effects are minimal and no medical follow-up may be required. However in many poisoning situations major effects including liver failure, kidney failure and respiratory failure.

What are common agents that cause 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.
- Solvents e.g. thinner and acetone
- Other products e.g. for personal care, for car/engine products, adhesives, sulphur, recreational drugs, lead, battery acid, flower seeds and organic phosphate.
- Food poisonings e.g. ciguatera toxin

This distribution is shown in the pie chart on the next page



Pie chart showing the common causes of poison in Jamaica in 2003

Symptoms of Poisonings

Different poisons affect the body in different ways: they can act quickly. If someone becomes very ill without an apparent reason, poisoning should be considered as 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