

**Florida Poison Information
Center/Miami**
Poison Prevention Teaching Guide
for Children



University of Miami Miller School of Medicine
Jackson Memorial Hospital





Talking About Poison with Children

The following information is to assist you with the topics and questions that we have found are frequently asked by children. If you have specific questions about poisons or have an exposure, always call the 1-800-222-1222 line for immediate assistance.

General Outline

What is a poison?

Anything that can get in your eyes, your nose, your mouth or on your skin that can hurt you or make you sick.

How could a poison get in your nose?

Usually when you inhale or breathe in fumes or gases.

The best first aid treatment for inhaled poisons is - fresh air. Call the Poison Center to see what to do next.

For example:

Your big sister is cleaning the bathroom and she spills some cleaning chemicals. She is coughing and rubbing her eyes. The chemical smell is very strong and you can smell it in the living room. Should you go into the bathroom and start mopping up the mess? No, you could end up like the lady who passed out from fumes and fell against the bathroom door, closing it so her rescuers couldn't get her. Always get yourself and the other person in fresh air first. Later, when you and your sister are not coughing, you can quickly run back in the bathroom and open the window. Take a break, then quickly run back in and throw some towels down to soak up the spill. Never stay around fumes that cause coughing, burning eyes or trouble breathing.

How could a poison get in your eye?

Usually when something squirts, spits or splashes in your face. Or if you make a mistake and put the wrong liquid in your eye instead of eye drops.

- The best first aid for something in your eye is the rinse with water for a few minutes.
- Then call the Poison Center to see what to do next.

For example:

Your older brother left his pimple lotion by the sink and your baby sister wanted to see what it was. She pulled it down, splashing it in her face by accident. Should you just let her blink and rub her eyes? Should you find some eye drops to put in her eye? No, you need to rinse the lotion out so it won't stay inside the eyelids and continue to do harm. You don't want to put in eye drops because that's another chemical and could cause more harm. Just plain old water is all you need. Pour water into her eye to rinse.

How could a poison get on your skin?

By a scratch, smear, spill or sting.

The best first aid for a poison on the skin is to rinse it with water. Then call the Poison Center to see what to do next.

For example:

Your father is using an acid aluminum cleaner and spills some on his arm. He says his arm is burning, but your family members all suggest something different for the chemical burn. Great-great-granny says to smear butter on it. Aunt Mabel says to neutralize it with baking soda water. Cousin Bertha says to put burn ointment on it. Mom says to use plain old water first. Water is correct. Why wouldn't you smear butter or ointment on a chemical burn? Because you're trapping the chemical next to the skin and it will continue to hurt and burn. You don't neutralize the acid because that produces a heat reaction and will burn more. By rinsing with water, it will clean and cool the skin.

How does a poison get in your mouth?

That's easy - by a splash or swallow.

If a person got poison in their mouth and they are awake and want something to drink, the best first aid for a swallowed poison is a little drink of water. Then call the Poison Center to see what to do next.

Script for Teaching Young Children about Poison Prevention

Preschool age: The following script is geared for ages 3-5.

School-age: Elementary school children will be familiar with these concepts, so you should vary your approach by discussing how they may help prevent poisonings by younger siblings. You may want to order the *Outdoor Poisons Slide Show* or *Babysitters Teaching Guide* (see Order Form) for use with older children.

Objectives:

To teach children that a poison can be anything that injures by getting in the eyes, nose, mouth, or on the skin.

To teach children to check with an adult before tasting.

To teach children that many poisons look like good things to eat or drink.

To teach children that mis-using products can result in a poisoning.

Outline:

Use commonly seen products, or pictures of products, to demonstrate hazards, progressing from items children recognize as dangerous to taste to those items they may not recognize as potentially hazardous :

- (1) the obvious poisons (chemicals, cleaners, pesticides, and gasoline)
- (2) products that may be used on children's bodies (nail polish, ointment)
- (3) products that children take internally (vitamins, medicine).

Outdoor poisons can also be covered.

Script:

Introduce yourself.

"Today, we're going to talk about poisons. A poison is anything that can get in your eyes, nose, mouth or on your skin and hurt you or make you sick. When some people think of poisonous things, they only think of poison snakes."

Pull a rubber snake out of your grab bag.

"This is just a pretend snake. But, actually, there are poisons right in your house that can hurt you. I'm going to pull some things out of this bag and I want you to tell me if you think you would get sick if you tasted them. (You can have the children shout answers together, or raise their hands, or clap their hands, i.e. "Clap your hands if this is bad to taste.")

Start with the obvious poisons that children usually know are dangerous.

Pull out furniture polish. "Do you think this would hurt you if you drank this?"

Pull out automotive product like transmission fluid or oil. "What about this?"

Pull out Comet. "What about this?"

Proceed to products that are used on children's bodies.

“Those were pretty easy questions. Most of you knew those were bad for you. But did you know that there are some things you use on your body that are OK on the outside of you, but would hurt you if you tasted them?” You can have the children pretend to “zip” their mouths closed because they are going to show, not tell by pointing to the part of the body the following products are used on (do not show any products that go in the mouth).

Pull out baby shampoo. “Point to where on your body this goes.”

“It goes in your hair. Do you know what would happen if you drank shampoo? It would bubble up in your stomach and then you’d throw-up bubbles. Yucky!”

Pull out nail polish. “Where does this go on your body?”

Pull out ointment in a white tube. “Where does this go?”

“Some people thought it was toothpaste. How many of you brush your own teeth? If you do, be careful that you get the right thing. If you brush your teeth with this ointment it would taste yucky!”

Proceed to products that children take by mouth.

“Now, the questions are going to get harder. Did you know that there are some things that you put in your mouth that could make you sick if you ate too much?”

Pull out vitamins. “Raise your hand if you take vitamins? If your vitamins are the kind that taste good, rub your tummy. If you think vitamins are good for you, pat your head. If you think that eating a whole lot of vitamins at one time would be bad for you, stick out your tongue and make an ugly face. Some vitamins taste good, but did you know that eating too many will make you sick? When you eat too many, it makes your stomach hurt, and it makes you throw up, and it makes you have diarrhea (you know, where you poop all day). It’s no fun to be sick!”

Pull out candy/medicine look-alike display. “Did you know that a lot of medicine looks just like candy? It’s hard to tell which are the pills? Medicine helps you get better when you are sick, but it’s very strong and if you eat too much, it can actually make you sick. So, never take medicine unless a grown-up gives it to you. And if you see something that looks like candy, but you’re not sure what it is, always ask a big person if it’s OK to eat. Can you point to a big person in this room?”

Pull out a doll or a magazine picture of a baby. “Now, the questions are getting harder. Did you know that some food and drink can be poisonous? For instance, do babies eat hamburgers? No. What do they eat? Baby food. Why? Because their bodies aren’t ready for hamburgers and they could get sick or even choke.”

Pull out a magazine picture of cigarettes and booze. “That’s the same reason you can’t have

cigarettes or alcohol. Your bodies aren't ready for it and it would make you very sick.

I made up a rhyme about that, too. **“For grown-ups, OK. For children, No Way!”**

“This all makes it hard to know what's OK to taste, doesn't it? But there is an easy way - Always Ask First! If you see something and you're not sure if it's OK to eat, always ask a big person if it's OK before you touch it.”

True story:

“I want to tell you a true story about a boy named Johnny. Johnny was playing outside and he got hot and thirsty. He went in the house and saw a glass on the table with some brown liquid in it. It looked like it could be coke or tea. He picked it up and drank some when all of a sudden his Mom came in, saw what he was doing and yelled, ‘Johnny! Don't drink that! It's bug killer!’ But Johnny had already swallowed some. His Mom called us at the Poison Center and asked what to do. We said he would have to go to the hospital. He did and he was very sick for a long time. Now, what could Johnny have done differently so he wouldn't get sick? When he went to reach for that glass on the table, what should he have done before he touched it? Whom should he have asked about it first?”

Outdoor Poisons:

Pull out rubber snake again, or magazine pictures of roses, bees, ants, caterpillars or snakes. “Now, let's talk about outdoor poisons. There are a lot of neat things to see outdoors, aren't there? Flowers, bugs, beaches. How many of you like to play outdoors?”

But there are some things outdoors that can hurt you. Has anyone in here ever been bitten by an ant? Other things that can hurt you are flowers with sticky things called thorns. Or caterpillars with stingers. Or snakes with fangs. You know when you pick up a living thing, it scares them and since they can't talk, they usually try to fly away or crawl away. But what do they also do to you sometimes, especially if you don't let them go? Sometimes they bite or sting you. So, always remember just to look at them, don't touch. I made a rhyme about outdoor poisons – **“If you look instead of touch, they can't hurt you very much.”**

Guide for Teaching Older Children about Poison Prevention

Audience: Grades 6-8

- Objectives:** The learner will
- Define the term poison.
 - List the four ways poison can enter the body.
 - Identify the toxic effects of fumes.
 - Develop safety rules about poisons.

Discussion & Activities:

1. Ask the class to define the term poison (**A poison is any medicine or product that hurts if used in the wrong way, in the wrong amount, or by the wrong person**). Explain that the word toxin is a synonym. Emphasize that the dose makes the poison. Explain that the amount of a product can be dangerous. Give examples: one vitamin a day is helpful but eating a whole bottle is harmful, window cleaner on the window is helpful but window cleaner in the eye is hurtful.
2. Ask students to list or draw the 4 ways poison can enter a person's body (**mouth, nose, eyes, skin**)
3. Work with the class to develop a list of safety procedures that will help students to protect themselves from poisons. List them on the chalkboard. Some ideas to include are the following:
 - Put the Poison Control Center telephone number near the telephone **1-800-222-1222**
 - Do not taste or smell anything unless you are certain it is safe, or a parent or trusted adult says it is safe
 - Do not put a product on your skin unless a parent or trusted adult says it is safe.
 - Tell adults to lock-up all poisons to keep them safe.

 - Never pick up or touch unknown substances or chemicals.
 - Read labels and instructions carefully and completely.
 - Use all products in a well-ventilated area.
 - When working with household products, wear protective gear such as gloves, safety glasses, safety mask.

Wrap-up:

4. Have the children share what they have learned about poisons. Ask the students: What is a poison? (**a substance that could hurt you, make you sick, even make you die, not good for your body**) Can you name 3 toxic effects from fumes? (**various negative effects: loss**

of brain power, memory loss, headache, blindness, burns around the nose and mouth, trouble speaking, death) Can you name 2 ways to say no to poisons? (identify hot situations, state your case, move away from the situation, other positive alternatives that the students come up with) Give out a poison control telephone sticker and a poison prevention packet to take home to parents.

Instructor Talking Points

Do:

- ✓ Point out that every day products can be poisons, pollutants, and fire hazards when used incorrectly.
- ✓ Stress using products as they were intended to be used.
- ✓ Say poisons, chemicals, toxins, fumes instead of inhalants or “drugs.”
- ✓ Emphasize reading product labels and following directions. Give examples of what “well ventilated” and “avoid concentrating fumes” mean.

Do not:

- ✓ Give medical advice, instead urge questioner to call the hotline
- ✓ Talk about the “high” or “head rush”
- ✓ Identify specific products used in abusing inhalants.

Poison Toss Interactive Game

For ages 4 - 8

Purpose: To increase children's awareness of potential poison hazards and to encourage them to **Always Ask First!**

Supplies: 3 large boxes or containers
3 signs to apply to boxes:

Safe to Taste with a picture of a child eating. Or a happy face with an open mouth

Poison with a skull & crossbones

Ask First with a picture of a child asking a question of an adult or a face with closed mouth. For older kids use a question mark.

(For 4 and 5 year olds simplify the game by using only 2 containers-**Safe to Taste** and **Ask First**)

Empty containers of medicines, household products, food items

Try to use products that are packaged similarly, for example:

Comet & Grated Parmesan Cheese

Milk plastic jug & Kitty litter plastic jug

Glued-shut plastic containers with the following look-alikes:

Tylenol, Good & Plenty

Sudafed (red), Red Hots

Skittles, Coricidin

Marshmallow, mothball

The object of the game is to not poison yourself (by putting any poisons in **Safe to Taste** box).

How to play:

Hand the child one product at a time and ask if it is OK to taste. Many are OK (milk, plastic fruits, juice, etc.). Put those in the **Safe to Taste** box. If a product is definite bad thing, put it in the **Poison** box. If you don't know what it is and are unsure, it's better to put it in the **Ask First** box. You do not have to know how to read to play this game. Children should **not** be helped by parents, but should be making their own decision, as they do whenever they see something interesting. Most children will get a few wrong, and you can teach them poison prevention principles by pointing out that they cannot take medicines without asking because they may take the wrong amount or that they don't eat things if they don't know what they are or **We fooled you!** You got a **look-alike**. If the child puts everything in the **Ask First** box, that would be correct. If time is a factor, use a timer or count down from 10 to let them know how long they have to sort products. When they are at the end

of their time, grade them by checking the **Safe to Taste** box. If they put no poisons in it, they win!

Interactive Exhibit Ideas



Candy/Medicine Display. Make a display from available pills. Find candies that look like pills and glue on paper. Put the paper on a poster board or in a clear plastic box frame. Let children guess which are medicines and which are candies. Explain that in real life, they should **NOT** guess, but **Always Ask First!**

Make a display of **Poison Look-alikes** (poisons that look like good things to eat or drink). Use any clear containers with a glued lid. **Examples:** Mothballs next to marshmallows **Clear liquids in 3 containers:** Vodka or rubbing alcohol, vinegar, water.

Blue liquids in 3 containers: PowerAde, Windex, Blue mouthwash.

Yellow liquids: Pine Sol, a yellow liquor, apple juice. (You'll need a fresh apple juice every time you display it, because it ferments and gets cloudy.)

Encourage children to guess which product is safe to eat or drink. Emphasize that in real life, it is safer **NOT** to guess, but to **Always Ask First!**

Get silk or potted plants (or photos of them) to make a **Poison Plant Display**, or have the audience guess which plant is poisonous if eaten. See Plant Brochure available from Poison Information Center. Many popular houseplants are poisonous if eaten. These include philodendron, pothos and ivy.

Make an “**Identify the Hazards**” cabinet for a manned booth. Make a cabinet out of a cardboard box and include **mistakes that lead to poisonings:** *poison stored next to food, poison stored in food or drink containers, non-child-resistant medicine containers, no cabinet latch on the door, poison look-alikes (Pine-Sol & apple juice).* This may be a little difficult for participants, so you can tell them that the hazards are listed in the Poison Prevention Guide (red and black brochure that says “Is Your Home Poison-Proof?”) on your table. Give a little prize for a correct answer.

A **Poisonous Critter Display** can be made by gluing rubber spiders, ants, bees, snakes, stingrays, jellyfish, etc. onto a poster board. Critters, or kits for making critters, can be found at craft, nature, science, or toy stores. Use our Florida Critters sheet for correct color descriptions or to cut and paste info

about each critter next to it on a board.



Important Points about Poison Control

- ✓ The Poison Control Hotline is a free service, available any time, day or night, nationwide.
- ✓ Callers speak to a doctor, nurse or pharmacist with special training in handling poison emergencies.
- ✓ You can call Poison Control with questions about poison or medication.
- ✓ No one gets in trouble for calling.
- ✓ All calls are confidential and protected by privacy laws.
- ✓ Even if a child has to go to the hospital for care, the poison control center follows their care to assure the best treatments are provided.