



# How to Prevent Poisonings in Your Home

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Consumers buy more than a quarter-million different household products for use in and around the home, including medicines, cleansers, cosmetics, pesticides and insecticides. While these products serve an important purpose, their misuse can cause illness, injury and even death.

Help prevent accidental poisonings by being aware of potential hazards and observing these National Safety Council poison prevention tips:

## **Bathroom**

- If young children live in your home, use a medicine cabinet with a child-proof latch and keep it secured, even if the cabinet is raised. Avoid opening the latch in front of children who may mimic your action.
- Use child-resistant caps on medications and keep them tightly closed. Child-resistant caps are meaningless if not properly fastened after each use.
- Never take medication in front of a child or refer to pills as candy.
- Check the label of your mouthwash for alcohol content. Some mouthwashes contain enough to poison small children. Consider alternative products.
- Even if there are no children present, create a dedicated medicine storage area.
- Always follow a medication's recommended dosage.
- Check expiration dates on unused over-the-counter and prescription medications. Safely dispose of those that are out of date.
- Use and store toilet bowl cleansers with caution; some are dangerously caustic and capable of burning tissue if ingested.

## **Bedroom**

- Hang or store mothballs and crystals in sealed containers inside closets or chests, removed from children's reach.
- Keep personal care items such as hair spray, cologne, perfumes, nail polish remover and astringents closed when not in use, and away from children.

## **Living Room**

- Stow your visitors' coats and purses away from children who might discover medications while curiously hunting through them.

- Ensure a lead-safe home (see the Council's **lead poisoning** fact sheet for more information). Children can be exposed to lead by ingesting lead dust found in paint that's on some toys, walls and window sills.

### **Kitchen**

- Check under your sink and in other cabinets for stored products that could be hazardous, such as bleaching agents, rust removers, drain cleaners, ammonia, oven cleaners, detergents, furniture polish, floor wax, metal polish, wax remover, and wall/floor/toilet bowl cleaners. Even food extracts, such as vanilla and almond, are potential poisons. If products cannot be moved, install safety latches on cupboard doors. Avoid opening latches in front of children who may mimic your action.
- Avoid storing cleaning compounds and foods together.
- Keep all substances in their original containers, with labels intact for important usage and safety information. Avoid transferring cleaning fluids and similar products into beverage bottles or cans.
- Keep potentially hazardous cleaning compounds capped. If toddlers are present, don't leave an open container unattended, even briefly.

### **Especially for Older Adults**

- Request medicine labels printed in larger type.
- If a child-restraint cap is difficult to use, ask your pharmacist for an alternative.
- To ensure you are taking the medicine you intended, turn on the lights and double-check the label, especially if you are sleepy or sick.
- Avoid dosage errors by using dosage containers that indicate the day of the week and/or time of day. Don't leave it to memory.
- If you are taking two or more prescriptions or over-the-counter medications, ask your pharmacist about unintended drug interactions.

### **Poisoning and Pets**

- Avoid feeding pets human food. Chocolate, for instance, can poison and kill a dog. Pets are healthier eating food specially formulated for their needs.
- Don't spray or store cleaning or pesticide products near pet food or water dishes. In the event of a spill, keep animals out of the area until it is clean.
- Because poisonous anti-freeze tastes sweet to dogs and cats, store these products carefully and immediately clean up spills and leaks.
- Remember wildlife. Spraying products on a windy day can carry the product into the water supply for wild animals.

## **Additional Precautions**

- Post the national toll-free number for the Poison Control Center (800-222-1222) and the phone number for your family doctor near the telephone.
- If you call your poison control center or doctor in an emergency, be sure to have the poisoning agent's original container and label handy.
- Get trained in **First Aid** to deal more effectively with poisonings and other emergency situations.