



Minnesota Poison Control System

www.mnpoison.org

Lesson 2: Poison Prevention (Adults)

Goal:

To decrease the frequency and severity of poisonings by:

- ◆ Increasing awareness of the Minnesota Poison Control System and the services provided
- ◆ Increasing knowledge to the types of products that are poisonous
- ◆ Increasing knowledge of poison prevention measures

What does the Poison Center do?

- ◆ The Poison Center offers information and guidance for poisoning emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.
- ◆ Our poison experts responded to over 60,000 calls last year.
- ◆ The services provided by the Poison Center include: poison emergency telephone service, professional education, public education, and research and data collection.

Staff:

- ◆ The staff consists of medical doctors, nurses, pharmacists, medical toxicologists, and health educators.

Poison facts:

- ◆ About 2 million unintentional poisonings are reported each year.
- ◆ Poisoning is the leading cause of unintentional injury deaths in the United States.
- ◆ Over 90% of poisoning deaths occur in adults over the age of 20 years.
- ◆ More than 40% of all poisonings occur in children under the age of six.
- ◆ Over 90% of poisonings that happen in residential settings can be handled safely at home by telephone consultation with the Poison Center.

What is a poison?

- ◆ A poison is any substance that can be harmful to humans if it gets in the body.
- ◆ Poisoning may occur when common household products are misused.

How can poisons enter the body?

- ◆ Ingestion (swallowed)
- ◆ Inhalation (breathe in)
- ◆ Dermal exposure (through the skin)
- ◆ Ocular exposure (through the eyes)



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Lesson 2 (continued):

Examples of Poisons:

1. Medicine

Medicine can make sick people healthy and healthy people sick.

- ◆ Never share prescription drugs even if symptoms are exactly the same. Always finish the amount of pills that were prescribed even if you feel better.
- ◆ Never transfer medicine out of its original container. Always check the expiration date and throw out any expired medication.
- ◆ Never call medicine “candy” because vitamins and medicines may be shaped like fun characters and even taste good; this may confuse children.
- ◆ Never take medication in front of children. Often children like to imitate adults.
- ◆ Always read the labels and follow directions on the container.
- ◆ If you are taking more than one medication, make a list of all your medications to include the name, reason you are taking it, the amount you are taking, the times of day you are take it, and the name and phone number of the doctor who prescribed it

2. Cleaning Products

Many household cleaners can be safe to use, but can also cause harm if inhaled or ingested. They can also cause skin and eye irritations. Combining products, such as ammonia and bleach, can release a terrible chemical gas that can be deadly.

- ◆ Always keep household cleaners in their original containers (locked up and out of reach and sight of children). Never transfer them into other empty containers.
- ◆ Store food and cleaners separately.
- ◆ Rinse all containers before disposing them.
- ◆ Older children should be supervised when using cleaning products and younger children should be taught not to touch them.

3. Plants

Plants can make our homes look beautiful, but may also be poisonous. Sometimes only a part of the plant can be poisonous such as the leaf or petal.

- ◆ Know the names of all the plants in your home and yard.
- ◆ Label all plants with their names so you can identify a plant if it is eaten.
- ◆ Keep house plants, seeds, and bulbs out of the reach of children.
- ◆ Do not eat wild plants or mushrooms; cooking poisonous plants does not make them safe to eat.
- ◆ Remove mushrooms growing in your yard, and throw them away in a covered garbage can.
- ◆ Teach your children to never put any part of a plant into their mouths.



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Lesson 2 (continued):

4. Carbon Monoxide

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas that can be deadly. It is produced by the incomplete burning of fuel. Sources of carbon monoxide include:

- ◆ Oil, wood, or gas furnaces
- ◆ Space heaters (kerosene heaters)
- ◆ Gas or oil water heaters
- ◆ Gas stoves
- ◆ Gas dryers
- ◆ Fireplaces and wood stoves
- ◆ Charcoal grills
- ◆ Automobiles
- ◆ Lawn mowers and other gas powered lawn equipment

Symptoms of CO Poisoning include:

- Sleepiness
- Headache
- Nausea
- Dizziness/Confusion
- Shortness of breath
- Faint feeling
- Blurred vision

At moderate levels, these symptoms can resemble those of the flu; however, death can result if you continue to be exposed to CO.

When to Suspect CO Poisoning:

- ◆ Do symptoms occur in a certain place such as the home? Do they appear and go away when you enter or leave the house?
- ◆ Do others in the home have the same symptoms, and did they appear around the same time?
- ◆ Are you using fuel-burning appliances that have not been checked in a while?
- ◆ Is your garage attached to the house? Do family members start the car inside the closed garage?

If you answered YES to these questions:

- Get yourself and others outdoors into fresh air as fast as possible.
- Call the Minnesota Poison Control System at 1-800-222-1222.
- Call 911 if someone is seriously ill.



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Lesson 2 (continued):

How to Prevent CO Poisoning:

- ◆ Have your fuel-burning appliances, venting, and chimney systems inspected by a professional technician at the beginning of each heating season.
- ◆ Choose appliances that vent to the outside and make sure they are properly installed and well maintained.
- ◆ Do not use an oven or gas range to heat your home.
- ◆ Do not let the fireplace or space heater run while you are sleeping.
- ◆ Never use charcoal grills inside your home, garage or inside a tent; only use in a well-ventilated area.
- ◆ Never leave an automobile engine running in a garage, even if the garage door to the outside is open. Fumes can build up quickly.
- ◆ Do not sleep in a parked car while the engine is running.
- ◆ Do not use any gasoline-powered engines, such as mowers, weed trimmers, chain saws, small engines, or generators in enclosed spaces.
- ◆ Install at least one carbon monoxide detector near the sleeping areas in your home.

5. Food Poisoning

Food poisoning is defined as any disease of an infectious or toxic nature caused by the consumption of food or drink. Most often, bacteria, viruses, or parasites can cause symptoms such as diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and stomach pain. *Salmonella* is a common bacteria found in raw meat, poultry, or eggs.

How to avoid food poisoning:

- ◆ Check the expiration dates on all foods, especially meats, poultry and dairy products; do not buy or use foods beyond their expiration dates.
- ◆ Do not use canned goods with bulges, leaks, or dents; this may be a sign that the food is unsafe to eat.
- ◆ Wash hands thoroughly with warm, soapy water before and after handling food and especially after using the bathroom.
- ◆ Keep raw food separate from cooked food; this prevents cross contamination from one food to another.
- ◆ Wash utensils and cutting boards after they have been in contact with raw meat or poultry and before they touch other food.
- ◆ Use one plate for raw meat and another plate after the meat is cooked.
- ◆ Refrigerate or freeze perishable food within two hours after buying or preparing. If room temperature is above 90°F, refrigerate perishable food within one hour.
- ◆ Cook meat, poultry, and seafood thoroughly. Meats should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160°F.
- ◆ Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly to remove visible dirt and throw out the outermost leaves of lettuce and cabbage.



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Lesson 2 (continued):

6. Cosmetics

Although cosmetics are intended to make us look and smell better, they can contain poisonous materials. Mouthwash, perfume, cologne, and other products contain alcohol and can be very dangerous if swallowed by a child. Perfume and other products can also cause eye irritation, allergic reactions on the skin, and wheezing or difficulty breathing for an individual with a weak respiratory system (due to asthma or other conditions).

What to do in a poisoning emergency:

The following is a list of first aid measures that can be taken in an emergency situation:

Swallowed poison:

- Do not induce vomiting
- Call the Poison Center

Inhaled poison:

- Get the victim to the fresh air immediately
- Open all windows and doors for fresh air
- Call the Poison Center

Poisoning in the eye:

- Flush the eye with lukewarm water for about 20 minutes
- Do not force the eyelid open
- Call the Poison Center

Poisoning on the skin:

- Remove contaminated clothing
- Rinse the victim's skin with water for 20 minutes
- Call the Poison Center

Poison Emergency Telephone Number

1-800-222-1222

******Note: If a person is non-responsive, has difficulty breathing, is not breathing, or is having seizures call 9-1-1 immediately******