



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Pesticides and Child Safety

Although pesticides can be beneficial to society, they can be dangerous if used carelessly or if they are not stored properly and out of the reach of children. According to data collected from the American Association of Poison Control Centers, in 1999 alone, an estimated 79,000 children were involved in common household pesticide-related poisonings¹ or exposures² in the United States. An additional 26,682 children were exposed to or poisoned by household chlorine bleach.

A survey by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regarding pesticides used in and around the home revealed some significant findings:

- o Almost half -- 47% -- of all households with children under the age of five had at least one pesticide stored in an unlocked cabinet, less than 4 feet off the ground (i.e., within the reach of children).
- o Approximately 75% of households without children under the age of five also stored pesticides in an unlocked cabinet, less than 4 feet off the ground (i.e., within the reach of children). This number is especially significant because 13% of all pesticide poisoning incidents occur in homes other than the child's home.

Bathrooms and kitchens were cited as the areas in the home most likely to have improperly stored pesticides. Examples of some common household pesticides found in bathrooms and kitchens include roach sprays; chlorine bleach; kitchen and bath disinfectants; rat poison; insect and wasp sprays, repellents and baits; and, flea and tick shampoos and dips for pets. Other household pesticides include swimming pool chemicals and weed killers.

EPA has important regulatory authority over pesticides in the United States under the pesticide law (the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act). Since 1981, the law has required most residential-use pesticides with a signal word of "danger" or "warning" to be in child-resistant packaging. These are the pesticides which are most toxic to children. Child-resistant packaging is designed to prevent most children under the age of five from gaining access to the pesticide, or at least delay their access. However, individuals must also take precautions to protect children from accidental pesticide poisonings or exposures.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTING ACCIDENTAL POISONING:

- o Always store pesticides away from children's reach, in a locked cabinet or garden shed. Child-proof safety latches may also be installed on cabinets and can be purchased at your local hardware store;
- o Read the label first and follow the directions to the letter, including all precautions and restrictions;
- o Before applying pesticides (indoors or outdoors), remove children and their toys as well as pets from the area and keep them away until the pesticide has dried or as long as is recommended by the label;
- o If your use of a pesticide is interrupted (perhaps by a phone call), properly reclose the package and be sure to leave the container out of the reach of children while you are gone;
- o Never transfer pesticides to other containers that children may associate with food or drink;
- o Never place rodent or insect baits where small children can get to them;
- o Use child-resistant packaging properly by closing the container tightly after use;
- o Alert others to the potential hazard of pesticides, especially care givers and grandparents;
- o Teach children that "pesticides are poisons" – something they should not touch;
- o Keep the telephone number of your area Poison Control Center near your telephone.

IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY, try to determine what the child was exposed to and what part of the body was affected before you take action, since taking the right action is as important as taking immediate action. *If the person is unconscious, having trouble breathing, or having convulsions, give needed first aid immediately. Call 911 or your local emergency service.*

If the person is awake, conscious, not having trouble breathing, and not having convulsions, read the label for first aid instructions and contact your local Poison Control Center, physician, 911 or your local emergency number – remember act fast because speed is crucial! In most cases, the pesticide product label provides you with a "Statement of Treatment" to follow in emergencies. The appropriate first aid treatment depends on the kind of poisoning that has occurred. If first aid instructions are not available, follow these general guidelines:

GENERAL FIRST AID GUIDELINES:

- o **Swallowed poison.** Induce vomiting **ONLY** if emergency personnel on the phone tell you to do so. It will depend on what the child has swallowed; some petroleum products or caustic poisons will cause more damage if the child is made to vomit. Always keep Syrup of Ipecac on hand (1 ounce for each child in the household) to use to induce vomiting if recommended by emergency personnel. Be sure the date is current.
- o **Poison in eye.** Eye membranes absorb pesticides faster than any other external part of the body; eye damage can occur in a few minutes with some types of pesticides. If poison splashes into an eye, hold the eyelid open and wash quickly and gently with clean running water from the tap or a gentle stream from a hose for at least 15 minutes. If possible, have someone else contact a Poison Control Center for you while the victim is being treated. Do not use eye drops or chemicals or drugs in the wash water.
- o **Poison on skin.** If pesticide splashes on the skin, drench area with water and remove contaminated clothing. Wash skin and hair thoroughly with soap and water. Later, discard contaminated clothing or thoroughly wash it separately from other laundry.
- o **Inhaled poison.** Carry or drag victim to fresh air immediately. If you think you need protection such as a respirator and one is not available to you, call the Fire Department and wait for emergency equipment before entering the area. Loosen victim's tight clothing. If the victim's skin is blue or the victim has stopped breathing, give artificial respiration (if you know how) and call rescue service for help. Open doors and windows so no one else will be poisoned by fumes.

Additional pesticide product information can be obtained from the **National Pesticide Telecommunications Network (NPTN)** at **1-800-858-7378**. NPTN is a toll-free information service operated Sunday-Saturday 6:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. Pacific Time and 9:30 a.m.- 7:30 p.m. Eastern time.

"Learn About Chemicals Around Your House," www.epa.gov/opptintr/kids/hometour. Visitors are challenged to find household products in a virtual house. Learn about health and environmental information on household products, what to do in an emergency, and product labels. The web site is designed for children (nine and older), parents and teachers.

1. The American Association of Poison Control Centers defines poisoning as an adverse reaction due to symptoms from exposure to a poisonous substance.
2. The American Association of Poison Control Centers defines exposure as having contact with a potentially poisonous substance; however, not necessarily showing symptoms of being poisoned.