

## Poisoning

Every year hundreds of children need medical care for poisoning from products commonly found around the home.

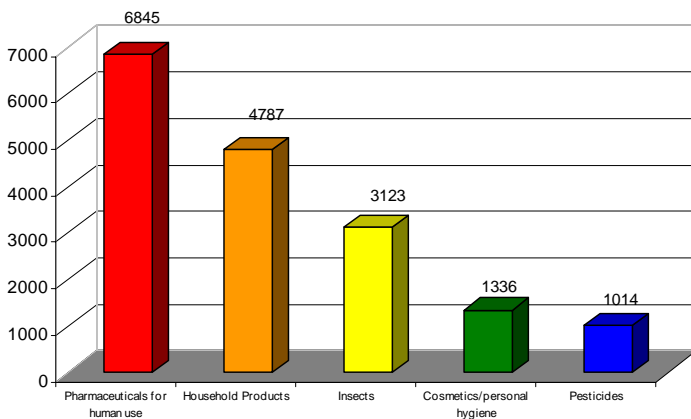
Most accidental poisonings occur to children less than five years of age, with children aged one to three most at risk.

The most common product involved in poisoning cases is paracetamol (a common painkiller found in almost every household).

Injury Surveillance data from the Princess Margaret Hospital Emergency Department shows:

- In 2004 161 children aged 0-4 years of age presented at Princess Margaret Hospital Emergency Department as a result of Poisoning.
- Almost 90% of poisoning presentations occurred in the child's own home. The most common locations were the living/dining area, kitchen and bathroom respectively.
- Approximately 80% of these were for children aged 1 to 3 years of age.

**Chart 2: Top Five Agent type/use by child\* victim**  
(Poisons Information Centre, 2002)



### Why Children Are at Risk?

Between 1 to 3 years of age children begin to get skills that make them more mobile. This means potentially toxic products are more easily reached.

Young children are exploring their world and will put anything they can get into their hands into their mouths.

At this age they are curious, but lack judgement and are unable to read.

They also like to imitate what others do, including taking medications.

### Amelia's story

Mum had just gone outside to hang out washing when two and a half-year-old Amelia woke unexpectedly from her nap.

Amelia was hungry. She wandered into the kitchen and managed to pull a stool over to the kitchen bench.

On the bench, Amelia saw a brightly coloured packet of what seemed to be lollies. She opened the packet, which were actually her father's hay fever anti-histamine tablets that he had left out on the bench to remind himself to take.

After a bit of work, Amelia got one of the tablets out, then another. She ate both before losing interest and turning her attention to the fruit bowl.

By the time her mum found Amelia and saw the packet on the floor, Amelia was drowsy and unsteady on her feet. Then her eyes began rolling backwards and her muscles went into spasms.

Her mum rushed her to the children's hospital where she was treated with drugs to stabilise her. She spent the night in hospital before being allowed to go home.

The experience was a traumatic one, both for Amelia and her parents, who thought they were going to lose their little girl. If dad's antihistamines had been locked away, up high and out of reach, this incident could likely have been avoided.

### When does poisoning occur?

Child poisoning can occur at anytime! But especially when your normal routine changes. For example medicine may be more accessible when someone is sick or when visiting grandparents who take medicines regularly.

Extra care is also required when on holidays, moving house, having visitors and during family problems.



## What can I do to Prevent Poisoning?

**Check every room in your home for poisonous products – “it only takes a few minutes to check if you are inviting trouble”:**

- Store poisons in a locked cupboard preferably 1.5 metres above the ground (out of sight, out of reach – locked up and away).
- Store medicines separately from chemicals and cleaners but ensure both are locked away.
- Use child resistant locks on cupboards or cabinets that store medicines and poisons. You can buy these at many hardware stores, or call Kidsafe WA on (08) 9340 8509 for more information.
- Don't store poisons near foods. Some children's medicines need to be kept in the refrigerator – use a small portable lockable container to enable these medicines to be stored safely.
- Return all poisons to their safe storage area **immediately** after you use or buy them. If you are using household products when the doorbell or phone rings take the product with you.



- Ask for and use products in child resistant containers and make sure the lids are on properly after use. However remember child resistant is **not** child proof – many two year olds can open them.
- Store all medicines, cleaners and chemicals in their **original** containers that are clearly labelled.
- Dispose of unwanted and out of date medicines. Contact your local pharmacy for advice.
- **Never** refer to medicines or vitamins as “lollies”.
- Before giving medicines always read the label.
- Keep your guests handbag out of reach of your child.
- Check that the plants in your garden are not poisonous. Ask your local nursery or visit [www.kidsafewa.com.au](http://www.kidsafewa.com.au) for a fact sheet.
- Always keep the Poisons Information Centre phone number 13 11 26 near your phone.

## What can be poisonous to children?

- All Medications; Over-the-counter and Prescription (eg. Paracetamol, Sedatives, Heart Pills, Iron Tablets and Contraceptive Pills)
- Drain Cleaners and Oven Cleaners
- Pesticides and Herbicides
- Dishwasher Powders
- Bleaches
- Alcohol (i.e. Perfumes and Methylated Spirits)
- Shampoos, Soap and
- Detergents
- Cigarettes
- Many more common household substances

## Real life poisonings

- Drank insecticide stored in Coca-Cola bottle
- Crawled into bathroom and opened cupboard, found eating Napsan
- At home in kitchen, swallowed dishwasher detergent while parent packing dishwasher.
- At Grandma's, child found playing with empty container of sleeping tablets
- In pool room at home, found playing with mum's bag, swallowed heart tablets
- Playing in friend's kitchen, ate rat poison

## In an emergency

If your child swallows a poison do not try to make them vomit. Pick up the poison's container, the child and take it with you to the phone. Ring the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 (Australia-wide, 24 hours a day). Keep this number by your phone.

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For more information ☎ (08) 9340 8509

Child Safety Information Line ☎ 1800 802 244

Poisons Information Centre ☎ 13 11 26

[www.kidsafewa.com.au](http://www.kidsafewa.com.au)

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