



# KEEP SAFE FROM POISONS

Virginia Poison Center

Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center

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## Fall is a “Berry” Good Time for Poisonous Plants

This autumn, take a moment to look around the yard and neighborhood. You will probably notice that quite a few plants have berries or seeds on their branches now. It is not unusual for small children to be attracted to these colorful berries as they resemble fruit. This leads to tasting which can be dangerous. Listed below are a few of the poisonous plants in Virginia that can cause problems if ingested:

*Pokeweed* is one of Virginia's most common weeds, springing up in any untended spot and growing quickly into a 3 to 6 foot tall nuisance. The berries are soft, plump and very dark purple in color when ripe. They hang in grape-like clusters on stems that are a bright pink color. Handling the berries often gives the skin and mouth a tell-tale purple stain from the juice. Eating the berries, mature foliage or root of this plant can cause serious poisoning particularly persistent nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.



*Jimsonweed* is found growing wild in fields and roadsides. The flowers of this plant are white, resembling the morning glory blooming in the summer months. In early fall spiny seedpods appear. All parts of the Jimsonweed are toxic, especially the seeds and leaves. Adolescents may ingest or smoke these parts of the plant for the intense, prolonged hallucinogenic effect. Other symptoms include hot, dry, flushed skin, pupil dilation, headache, stupor, rapid and weak pulse, convulsions and possibly coma and death.

*Yew* has become a popular and lovely plant used to hedge the yard or garden. These evergreen shrubs bare a small, hard-shelled seed surrounded by a soft red fruit that is quite poisonous if eaten. Symptoms can include vomiting, diarrhea, convulsions and in large amounts, death.

If you suspect someone may have ingested any plant – native or cultivated – **call the Virginia Poison Center immediately at (800) 222-1222.**



## Is Your Vacation Souvenir Lead Glazed Pottery??

At summer's end, many Americans return home with treasures acquired while on a trip to a foreign land. These are fun reminders of a great vacation, but if the souvenir is ceramic pottery, be careful! Pottery made in other countries is often not regulated for safety, and high levels of lead may have been used in the glazes. If you keep these items for a colorful decoration in your home, they pose no threat. If used to prepare, store or serve foods some may be hazardous. Foods that contain naturally acidic fluids-like fruit

juice or tomatoes-are especially dangerous if stored or served in ceramic pottery. If the pottery was improperly fired, the natural acids in these foods can cause the lead in the glaze to dissolve into the food. Lead poisoning may be the result. The safest course of action when you have ceramic pottery purchased outside the U.S. is to enjoy its beauty as decoration only. For more information contact the EPA's lead poisoning information service at (800) 532-3394, or contact Virginia's Lead Safe program at (804) 225-4455.









# HALLOWEEN SAFETY



Children anticipate Halloween with great excitement. Costume parties, bobbing for apples, pumpkin patches and "trick-or-treating" fill the air. Parents should be aware of the potential hazards that go along with some of the festivities. Awareness of safety concerns will help you and your family enjoy a safe, fun holiday.

In recent years, possible tampering with Halloween candies and treats has been the number one concern of many parents. This is certainly a potential danger, but the actual number of cases of illness traced each year to candy contamination is extremely small. Still, it is wise to follow these guidelines for trick-or-treat candy safety:

-  Inspect all candies before children are allowed to eat them.
-  If tampering is suspected (torn wrapper, broken seal, odd appearance, etc.) and no one has eaten any of the product, throw it away.
-  If tampering is suspected and the product has already been eaten, consult the Virginia Poison Center immediately.
-  If the product has been obviously altered to cause harm (glass, foreign objects, razor blades, etc.) report this to your local sheriff or police department.

Some other common substances used in Halloween celebrations that may cause concern include:

-  Dry ice, often used in a punchbowl to make a "Witches Brew," is not poisonous. However it can cause frostbite burns if it comes in direct contact with the skin or mouth. Be sure it is wrapped in cheesecloth in the punchbowl to prevent anyone from swallowing any pieces.
-  Light sticks and glow jewelry usually contain a chemical which is not harmful in small amounts, but can cause a mild irritation to the mouth and throat if swallowed. It is very irritating to the eyes, as well
-  Before purchasing a Halloween make-up kit, check the label to make sure that it is non-toxic. Most contain only small amounts of colorants and oils which, if ingested should not cause problems.



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## About the Virginia Poison Center. . .

What is the correct first action to take if someone is exposed to a possible poison? **Call the Virginia Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.** All calls are always free of charge. Nurses with special training in toxicology are on staff twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to answer emergency calls about poisoning. They can give first aid instructions and tell you if treatment by a hospital or physician is required. The Virginia Poison Center helps with more than 100 calls daily. Most of these cases are safely handled over the phone. With our expert help, costly trips to the emergency department can be avoided. Some examples of poisonings we can help with include: overdoses of medications, bites and stings from animals and insects, ingestion of household chemicals, inhaled fumes or vapors, and chemicals accidentally splashed in the eyes or on the skin. For more information, or to request brochures or poison

center stickers please contact us at our *non-emergency* phone number: (804) 828-4780.

**Virginia Poison Center**  
Richmond, VA  
**(804) 828-4780 Business Line**

