



Poison Safety News

Winter Issue



A HOME REMEDY?

Milk is a good thing to give someone who's swallowed a poison: it helps to coat the stomach to protect the victim from the poison. **Do you believe this poison myth?** It's just an "old wife's tale", probably mistaken information passed on from many years ago, before good medical science. Doctors now know that milk doesn't really help someone who's swallowed a poison. **So, if someone has taken too much medicine or ingested a cleaner by mistake, don't waste precious time on this old home remedy.**

And don't wait to see if the person becomes sick. There are **many poisons which cause harm that can't be seen.** The correct first action to take is an immediate call to your Virginia Poison Center. The experts at the poison center will be able to help you, by telling you what is the right treatment to give the victim. The poison center staff will tell you whether you need to go to a doctor. Post the emergency number near your phone: **1-800-222-1222.**



Your call will be answered by nurses with special training. Twenty-four hours daily, they answer emergency calls about poisoning and assist with first aid advice. The experts at the Virginia Poison Center respond to more than a hundred calls daily. Most of these cases are safely handled over the phone, avoiding unnecessary trips to the emergency department.



USE KEROSENE AND LAMP OIL WITH CAUTION



Winter brings chilly weather, and many homes in Virginia will be warmed by the toasty glow of a woodstove or kerosene heater. Dark evenings will be brightened by the cheery light from lamps, which burn lamp oil, a fuel that is nearly identical to kerosene. If these will be used in your home this winter, your family's safety depends upon taking action to avoid poisoning problems.

Children can be hurt by swallowing even a small amount of kerosene or lamp oil. Many lamp oils come in pretty colors and are very attractive to a small child. Toddlers may drink lamp oil right out of the lamp itself. Don't leave these lamps in reach of small children. Kerosene used in heaters is often kept in large metal cans and put into the heater using a plastic pump or siphon device. Poisoning can happen when a small child puts the end of the plastic tube in his mouth, drinking the few drops of the fuel that's left in there. Another situation that can cause problems is the use of kerosene to get a woodstove fire started. If you keep kerosene in a glass jar near the stove for this purpose, children can be poisoned by taking a drink from that little jar.

Winter months also increase the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Remember that carbon monoxide is produced any time a fuel is burned. This deadly gas has no smell and is invisible. Put at least one carbon monoxide alarm in the home if you use a woodstove, kerosene heater, or any other fuel-burning appliance.

Prevention is the best treatment for poisoning. Take action to protect your family from kerosene, lamp oils and carbon monoxide. If you think that someone has been exposed to any poison, call the Virginia Poison Center immediately at **1-800-222-1222.**



'TIS THE SEASON FOR COUGH AND COLDS

Every winter, many families have a series of "colds" passed from one person to the next for what seems like several long months. The common cold, called an upper respiratory tract infection (URI) by doctors, is the cause of much misery. Fortunately, it's quite rare for these to cause any serious danger. A number of different viruses cause URI'S, and there is no real cure available. The body's systems will eventually fight off the virus. However, many people go to the pharmacy in search of medicine to get relief from the uncomfortable symptoms. The drug store shelves are full of products to ease the misery of coughing, sneezing, congestion, etc. **Here are some safety tips to follow:**

It is possible to overdose on cough / cold medicines—don't assume that because many are sold without a doctor's prescription, they must be harmless. Follow the package directions, and don't take "extra" medicine to treat "extra" misery.

Read the label! Check the ingredients, the precautions and dosing information. Even if you've taken the medicine in the past, it may not be exactly the same now. Products change frequently, and the formula may have been changed without being given a new name. Or the package may look different but the ingredients remain the same.

Taking more than one kind of cough and cold medicine in the same day can be tricky since so many of these products have more than one ingredient. It's important to not accidentally take too many doses of the same (or very similar) medicines. Ask the pharmacist for help in deciding which medicines can be safely taken in the same day.

Be especially careful about taking too much acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®). This medicine can cause liver damage if too much is taken, either all at one time or over a few days. It's a very common ingredient in cough and cold products.

Store cough/cold medications in a locked cabinet to protect children. Many of these are colorful and tasty, so they are tempting to young children. Don't depend on the "child-proof" cap to keep children from getting into the bottle.

Cough and cold medicines may offer some relief from the misery of viral illnesses that many people suffer during the winter. However, these medicines can cause harm if used incorrectly, so take these simple steps to keep your family safe. **If anyone has taken too much medicine, help is only a phone call away at your Virginia Poison Center.** Call the poison center right away—don't wait to see if the patient will get sick. Most of the time, if the poison center is called soon after a medicine mistake, a visit to the doctor isn't needed. Keep the poison center's emergency number posted near the phones in your home. Use cough and cold medicines carefully, and stay healthy this winter.

For more information, or to request brochures or poison center stickers please visit our website at www.vapoison.org or you may contact us at our non-emergency phone number: (804) 828-4780.

Virginia Poison Center
Richmond, VA
(804) 828-4780 Business Line
www.vapoison.org

