

Child poisoning in the home - prevention

Unintentional child poisonings in the home are common and they usually don't happen because parents or carers are negligent. Most of these children come from loving families with attentive, caring parents or guardians, but it's simply not possible to watch your children every minute of every day.

However there are lots of things parents, grandparents and carers of young children can do to reduce the risk of child poisoning.

Common poisons in the home

Many common household products are poisonous, including washing machine powder and dishwashing detergent. The five most common causes of accidental poisoning of young children are:

- Medicines (particularly paracetamol)
- Caustic substances such as dishwashing powder, oven cleaners and drain cleaners
- Petrol, turpentine and weed killers
- Bleaches
- Eucalyptus oil and other essences.

High risk times

Children are most likely to get hold of poisons:

- When they are being used
- Before they have been put away
- When they are left out to use later.

Age and development are also factors

Poisoning often happens around the time of an unexpected change in a child's development. As they get older, children can be more able and curious than many parents give them credit for. Children aged one to two years are most at risk of swallowing poison. This is when they begin to move about and tend to put everything in their mouths.

How to poison proof your home

- Read the label of medicines and common products. Follow instructions and keep out of reach of children
- Lock poisons away.
- Store poisons out of reach and out of sight, including those stored in the refrigerator, particularly if it is a brightly coloured liquid.
- Don't underestimate your child's abilities or interests.
- Check the child-resistant cap is working on medicine and cleaning containers.
- Avoid taking medicines in front of your children (they may think you are having something nice and copy you).
- Explain to the child that this is dangerous
- Never refer to medicines as 'lollies'.
- Always keep your dishwasher door locked.
- Don't leave paintbrushes to soak in mineral turpentine.
- Keep your own and visitors' handbags out of your child's reach.

- Never transfer chemicals or cleaning products to another container, especially food or drink containers.

Where to get help?

- Victorian Government health information – Remove the risk campaign
- Royal Children’s Hospital Safety Centre Tel. (03) 9345 5085
- Kidsafe – Child Accident Prevention Foundation Tel. (03) 9251 7725
- The emergency department of your nearest hospital
- In an emergency, always call triple zero for an ambulance Tel. 000
- Your doctor
- Victorian Poisons Information Centre Tel. 13 11 26 – seven days a week, 24 hours a day – for advice about poisonings, suspected poisonings, bites and stings, mistakes with medicines and poisoning prevention advice.



Things to remember

- Most child poisonings happen because caring parents underestimate the abilities of young children.
- Keep all poisons, especially things you use everyday like medications, bleach, detergents and dishwashing powder, well out of reach.
- Don’t take medicines in front of your children; they may try to copy you.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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