

Chemicals and Poisons



Background Information for Teachers:

Children are exposed to a large number of chemicals of both natural and man-made origin. Exposure occurs through the air they breathe, the water they drink or bathe in, the food they eat, and the soil they touch (or ingest as toddlers). They are exposed at home, in the school, on the playground, and during transport.

Chemicals may have immediate, acute effects, as well as chronic effects, often resulting from long-term exposures. About 47 000 persons die every year as a result of such poisoning. Many of these poisonings occur in children and adolescents, are unintentional ("accidental"), and can be prevented if chemicals were appropriately stored and handled. Chronic, low-level exposure to various chemicals may result in a number of adverse outcomes, including damage to the nervous and immune systems, impairment of reproductive function and development, cancer, and organ-specific damage.

Children are at risk of coming into contact with these poisons. Very young children explore, taste and touch objects and crawl on the ground and floors, exposing them to chemicals. In poor areas, children as young as five years, may begin working to help their families, often in agriculture, becoming exposed to pesticides and fertilizers.

Content for the Activity:

What are poisons?

Poisons are chemicals that can hurt your body. If you drink them, eat them or breathe them in, then they can make you sick.

How can you protect your body?

Wash your hands before eating or drinking.

What can you do if you swallow a poison?

Tell an adult.
Call the emergency department.

The Trouble Spots

- **Kitchen:** The cupboard under the sink with its polishes, bleaching powder, detergents, ammonia, washing powder, insecticides and cleaning agents for drainpipes, ovens and windows.
- **Bathroom:** Medicines and tablets, e.g. aspirin, Panado, tonics, iron tablets and home perm kits.
- **Toilet:** Disinfectants, deodorant blocks and toilet cleaners.
- **Bedroom:** Perfumes, nail polish and nail polish remover, moth balls and insect repellents in strips, sticks, aerosol cans and fluids. All batteries.
- **Garage and garden shed:** Petrol, paraffin, brake fluid, battery acid, anti-rust paint, paint thinners, swimming-pool chemicals, weed killers, insecticides, pesticides, rodenticides and fertilizers. A small child may also accidentally spray products from aerosol cans into his eyes.
- **Poison out of doors:** Some plant, berries and mushrooms are poisonous. Children should be taught never to eat anything from the garden before asking an adult.

IMPORTANT

- Store poisons away safely, preferably in a locked cupboard.
- Go to the doctor or clinic immediately if you suspect that your child has accidentally swallowed some medicine or a poison.
- Treat all cases of poisoning as urgent. If you take the child to a doctor or hospital, also take along the following: the container, label, prescription, remaining tablets, the substance swallowed, vomited matter or whatever might help the doctor to identify and estimate the amount of poison taken.



World Health Organization



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