Unintentional Poisoning on the Rise

Each year, according to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, more than two million poisonings are reported by Poison Control Centers nationwide. Of these poisonings, more than 90 percent occur in the home with 51 percent of poisonings involving children under the age of 6. Among adults, especially older adults, poisonings that occur are often fatal.

Poisoning is the fastest-rising cause of accidental death in the U.S. and the second-leading cause of unintentional death following motor vehicle collisions. Poisoning has surpassed falls as the leading cause of death among older individuals as a result of overdoses of over the counter, prescription and illicit drugs.

Poisoning can occur from ordinary household products such as cleaning products, cosmetics, personal care products, plants and medications. In addition, lead poisoning and carbon monoxide poisoning can occur posing a significant risk to children. For older adults, poisoning can occur when medication labels are misread or medication has been mistaken for another product. Incidents such as these are preventable when safety measures are in place and everyone adheres to them.

Poisonings are seen year round; however, specific times throughout the year, certain poisonings can occur. For example:

Fall
- Medicines
- Mushrooms
- Berries
- Back to school and art supplies
- Carbon monoxide (CO)

Winter
- Antifreeze
- Snow salt

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- Mercury (thermometers)
- Carbon Monoxide (CO)

Spring
- Household cleaners and other products
- Pesticides

Summer
- Food poisoning
- Insect bites
- Snake bites
- Spider bites
- Insect spray or lotion
- Plants
- Alcoholic drinks and products

March 20th – 26th is National Poison Prevention Week. During this event and throughout the year, Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue (www.pwcgov.org/fire) in conjunction with poison prevention organizations, agencies and control centers, urge the public to focus on the dangers of poisonings and to take the necessary precautions when handling household chemicals and/or medications.

Safety Tips
- **Lock them up.** Keep medicines and toxic products in locked or childproof cabinets.
- **Know the number.** 1-800-222-1222 (24 hours/7 days a week, nationwide Poison Help Hotline) place on or near every home telephone; program it into your cell phone.
- **Don’t keep it if you don’t need it.** Safely dispose of unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs.

**Remember:** Poisoning can happen to anyone of any age; it is not child specific. When poisoning occurs:

- **Call 911 Immediately!**
  - If the victim is unconscious, having difficulty breathing or having convulsions
- **Call the Poison Center 1-800-222-1222**
  - If swallowed or inhaled
  - If splashed on skin or in eyes


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