

| | | |
|---|---|---|
|  |  | Upstate New York Poison Center |
| 1-800-222-1222 | | |

Poison Prevention

Newsletter Winter 2006

 **SUNY Upstate Medical University**
University Hospital • 750 East Adams Street • Syracuse, NY 13210

The Medicine Cabinet

Safe use and storage of medicines

During the winter months there can be an increase in cough and cold medicines brought into the home. It is an ideal time to check your medicine cabinet and dispose of expired or out-of-date medicines. Look for medicines which have a noticeable change in color or smell; and those with illegible or missing labels and package instructions.

Follow these safe storage tips to avoid unintentional exposures:

- Keep all medications in their original containers, even if it is almost empty.

Continued on page 2



Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

By Michele Caliva RN, CSPI, Lee Livermore BA

Carbon monoxide (CO) exposure is the leading cause of poisoning in the United States. There are 5,000 cases of accidental exposures to CO each year. CO is an odorless and colorless gas that is formed when a fuel such as charcoal, wood, gasoline, kerosene and propane fail to completely burn off. A person is poisoned when they breathe in this gas. The carbon monoxide that they breathe in takes the place of oxygen in a person's red blood cells causing a lack of oxygen to circulate throughout the body.

The majority of carbon monoxide poisoning cases occur during the winter months and are the result of malfunctioning furnaces, propane gas heaters, car exhaust, the indoor use of charcoal grills, generators, the use of gas stoves as a heat source, fires and propane fueled equipment. An example of CO poisoning can occur from unexpected sources such as a Zamboni. A Zamboni is a truck that is used to clean and smooth out the ice on an ice rink. This very effective tool is dangerous if used in a poorly ventilated indoor rink.

What are the symptoms?

The initial signs and symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness and nausea. People often describe their symptoms as being "flu like". Long-term exposure to CO can cause heart and brain damage, which ultimately lead to death. Delayed effects caused by failure to get treatment or chronic exposure to low levels of CO includes memory loss, impaired thinking and confusion.

How is carbon monoxide poisoning diagnosed?

The diagnosis of carbon monoxide poisoning is determined by a blood test. A small amount of blood is taken and a carboxyhemoglobin level is run to determine if there is a high level of CO in the bloodstream.

Continued on page 2



| | | |
|---|---|---|
|  |  | Upstate New York Poison Center |
| 1-800-222-1222 | | |
| <p>Poison emergency? Poison information? Call Us!</p> <p>Visit us on the web: www.upstatepoison.org</p> | | |

The initial treatment for suspected exposure to CO is to get out of the house and into fresh air. The next step is to get medical attention so that additional oxygen can be given to you and the blood test can be taken to determine if you are poisoned.

Tips to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning

- Install a carbon monoxide (CO) alarm near bedrooms and on each floor of your home. If your alarm sounds, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission suggests that you press the reset button, call emergency services (911 or your local fire department), and immediately move to fresh air (either outdoors or near an open door or window).
- Know the symptoms of CO poisoning: headache, fatigue, dizziness, and shortness of breath. If you experience any of these symptoms, get fresh air right away and contact a doctor for proper diagnosis or call the poison center at 1-800-222-1222.
- Make sure heating equipment is installed properly. Have a trained specialist inspect and tune up your heating system each year.
- Keep portable space heaters at least 3 feet from anything that can burn, including bedding, furniture, and clothing. Never drape clothing over a space heater to dry.
- Keep children and pets away from space heaters. Never leave children in a room alone when a space heater is in use.
- If you use a kerosene heater, use only the fuel recommended by the manufacturer. Never put gasoline in a kerosene heater - it could explode. Before you refuel the heater, turn it off and let it cool down. Refuel outside only.
- When using a kerosene heater, keep a door open to the rest of the house or open a window slightly. This will reduce the chance of carbon monoxide build-up in the room.
- Have your fireplace chimney and flue inspected each year and cleaned if needed. Open the flue and use a sturdy fireplace screen when you have a fire. Burn only untreated wood; never burn paper or pine branches - pieces can float out the chimney and ignite your roof, a neighbor's roof, or nearby trees.
- If you use a wood-burning stove, have the chimney connection and flue checked each year. Make sure the stove is placed on an approved stove board to protect the floor from heat and coals.
- Never use your range or oven to heat your home, even for a short time.



Guests and Babysitters

During the holiday season visitors often bring prescription and over-the-counter medicines with them in their purses or suitcases. Often they are not kept in the original container. They may be in a pillbox, a portion of the original packaging or worse yet, loose in a pocket or purse. Direct guests to a location to store their medicines away safely, out of the reach of children and pets.

If a babysitter and/or caregiver is to dispense medication to your child while you're out of the house, remember to include instructions as to when and how much medicine is to be given. They should always read and follow medicine labels. It's important to keep medicines out of the sight and reach of young children and use child-resistant caps. Be sure all babysitters and/or caregivers know where to find the number for the Poison Control Center. If you need phone stickers, magnets or poison prevention information call the Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

The Medicine Cabinet

Continued from page 1

- Store medicines in a cool and dry place since heat and humidity can affect their potency.
- Antibiotics that are reconstituted at the pharmacy might require refrigeration. If so take extra precautions to store them away from other food products.
- Separate your medications in the medicine cabinet. Keep OTC medicines on one shelf and prescriptions on another.
- Avoid mixing medicines with other first aid and beauty products when possible.

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines call or bring them to your local pharmacy. When disposing of medicines follow the guidelines for your area.

Pet Safety in the Winter

Foods to Avoid Feeding to Your Pet

- Alcoholic beverages
- Avocado
- Chocolate (*Especially dark and cooking chocolate can be fatal. Milk chocolate is not as serious, but the amount ingested can create problems.*)
- Coffee (*all forms of coffee*)
- Fatty foods
- Macadamia nuts
- Moldy or spoiled foods
- Onions, onion powder
- Raisins and grapes
- Salt
- Yeast dough
- Cooked poultry bones

Cold Weather Hazards

Liquid potpourris: Exposure to some types of liquid potpourris can result in severe oral, dermal and ocular damage.

Ice melting products can be irritating to skin and mouth.

Rat and mouse bait: place these products in areas that are inaccessible to your companion animals.

Antifreeze can be Fatal!

Antifreeze is a serious wintertime danger to dogs and cats that go outside. It has a sweet taste and so easily attracts animals. Antifreeze is toxic and can cause death in your pet – should you suspect ingestion (no matter how slight) contact your veterinarian immediately! Poisoning is swift; around a tablespoon is deadly to an average-sized dog, and the mortality rate is about 88 percent. The dog's liver actually turns against itself breaking down the antifreeze and changing it into oxalic acid. A dog cannot metabolize this substance, and this is what leads to health problems and often death. To avoid this danger, be sure and dispose of antifreeze in secured containers and inaccessible to your pet. Always mop up any spills the instant they happen and be aware of puddles near parked cars. Sprinkling the area with an absorbent material such as sand, cat litter, wood shavings or sawdust will prevent the dog from licking the spot where the spill or leak occurred.

Signs of antifreeze poisoning are:

- Stumbling
- Vomiting
- Inability to urinate

Info provided by Furr-Angels and familydogservice.com



Visit us on the Web

www.upstatepoison.org

You can now visit us on the web. The Upstate New York Poison Center's web site is a wealth of information. Get the facts on poison tips, education, and more.

We offer educational opportunities with Train-the-trainer programs designed for teachers, healthcare professionals and childcare providers. You can download our ABC's of teaching poison prevention and begin today! All of our educational materials are in a (pdf) format for easy downloading and reproducing. You can catch up on back issues of our newsletter "Poison Prevention" too! While you are

there take our site survey and let us know how you liked the site. We are always looking for valuable feedback and suggestions for improvement.



CALLING AREA FOR THE UPSTATE NEW YORK POISON CENTER



A Service of the State University of
New York Upstate Medical University at
University Hospital, Syracuse.

Unintentional Poisoning Can Happen To You..At Any Age!

To receive your **FREE** telephone stickers, magnets, and information brochures, dial 1-800-222-1222 ask for the Health Educator at The Upstate New York Poison Center.