



# Poison Prevention

## Newsletter

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UPSTATE MEDICAL UNIVERSITY • 750 East Adams Street • Syracuse, NY 13210

### Carbon Monoxide: Odorless, Colorless, Tasteless and Deadly

By Mary Beth Dreyer, MEd Public Health Educator for Western Region

With colder weather approaching, people will rely on furnaces and fireplace to keep their houses at comfortable temperatures. Those heating sources, however, are a common source of carbon monoxide poisoning, a leading cause of accidental deaths in America.

Carbon monoxide – odorless, colorless and tasteless – is a deadly hazard all year round. All fuel-burning equipment and appliances create the risk for carbon monoxide, including water heaters, wood and gas fireplaces, generators and automobile engines. At its mildest, carbon monoxide poisoning can feel a little like the flu – causing headaches, dizziness, exhaustion, confusion, fainting and vomiting. But at its worst, exposure to carbon monoxide can be fatal. In 2008, exposure to carbon monoxide resulted in 47 U.S. deaths, according to data from the American Association of Poison Control Centers. U.S. poison centers took 14,461 calls about carbon monoxide exposure in 2008.

As we face the upcoming colder months, the Upstate New York Poison Control Center offers these tips for combating carbon monoxide:

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### Prescription Drug Abuse

Drug abuse is defined as “the use of a prescription medication in a way not intended by the prescribing doctor.” Prescription drug abuse includes taking too much of a prescription written for your post-operative care, taking a friend's prescription painkiller for a backache or snorting ground-up pills to get high. Prescription drug abuse continues to be a growing problem in the United States.

In 2007, according to the CDC more than 5 million people age 12 and older admitted to using prescriptions for non-medical reasons. In a more recent study, the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) reported in 2010 that approximately 7.0 million people reported taking psychotherapeutic drugs (including pain-relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants and sedatives) non-medically.

#### The contributing factors:

- **Increasing availability** – Over the last twenty years prescriptions for stimulants increased by six-fold from five million to forty-five million, and opioid analgesic increased six-fold from thirty million to one hundred eighty million.
- **Misperceptions about their safety** – Because these medications are prescribed by doctors many assume that they are safe to take under **any** circumstances. (False! Prescription drugs are prescribed for a specific person, to treat a specific condition under specific circumstances. Illicit use and abuse can lead to a variety of adverse health effects including addiction.)
- **Motivation for misuse and abuse** – The reasons vary from person to person. Whether the original intent is to get high, reduce pain or anxiety or help with sleep problems, the use of prescription drugs comes with serious risks.

While most people do not consider drug misuse and abuse a potential poisoning, anytime a product is used in a way it was not intended the risk of an unintentional poisoning increases.

Preventing prescription drug abuse starts with early intervention strategies. Teach children to always stop and ask first before they touch, taste or smell, especially over-the-counter and prescription medications. Keep track of the different medications and the quantities of each by keeping a journal of the medication with the name, who it is for, the purpose of the medication, the quantity and date it was filled. Research shows that kids are gaining easier access to drugs found in the home. When possible secure prescription medications in a locked container or cabinet to prevent an unintentional poison exposure.

Program the number for the poison center 1-800-222-1222 into your cell phone or post the number somewhere in your home for easy access, just in case.

Sources: <http://oas.samhsa.gov/NSDUH/2k10NSDUH/2k10Results.pdf>, <https://nsduhweb.rti.org/>



# Poisons in Cigarettes

Did you know that there are over 4,000 chemicals in cigarettes with 51 of them known to cause cancer? Thanks to advocacy of organizations like Health Literacy and the American Cancer Society most people are aware that there are toxic chemicals in cigarettes and other tobacco products. What most people don't know is what those chemicals are. There is not enough room to list all of the chemicals however here are a few:

- **Acetone** – an active ingredient in nail polish
- **Ammonia** – A colorless gas. Tobacco companies have stated it adds flavor, however scientists have discovered that ammonia allows you to absorb more nicotine, therefore keeping you hooked on smoking
- **Arsenic** – Used to make insecticides, kill rats and gophers
- **Butane** – A hydrocarbon used as fuel
- **Cadmium** – A toxic metallic chemical used in alloys that causes damage to the liver, kidneys and the brain, and stays in your body for years
- **Formaldehyde** – A gas used as a preservative for dead bodies and is a disinfectant

The top three most dangerous and toxic chemicals are Tar, Nicotine and Carbon Monoxide. Nicotine is a poisonous drug. Tar is the residue that sticks to and coats



the inside of your lungs. Carbon Monoxide is a poisonous gas. These three chemicals alone are reason enough to never start smoking or if you are smoking, quit!

Children can be exposed to poisons at home and at school. Children are more likely to be introduced to smoking and other drugs by friends and other people they meet at school. Don't let your children be exposed to these toxic chemicals. Teach them the facts. For more information visit these websites; <http://tobaccofreenys.org/>, <http://healthliteracy.worlded.org/docs/tobacco/>, and <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Tobacco/cessation>

## HEALTH DEPARTMENT WEBINAR

Following the closing of 3 Poison Centers in NYS, the service area of the Upstate New York Poison Center expanded to 54 counties. With the challenge of an additional 3.6 million people (total 7.3) an even greater geographic expanse and a reduction in the number of educators in our coverage area, new strategies and new partners for public outreach were essential. Distance learning would become part of the solution.

On October 5th, our first endeavor, a region-wide webinar was held for health educators at our Departments of Health to:

- Update participants on the staff, scope, services and functions of UNYPC
- Demonstrate our teaching tools, including our new TOOLKIT
- Identify strategies for poison safety outreach
- Introduce our website as a resource
- Explain options for reporting outreach efforts

Working collaboratively with Central New York Master's of Public Health Program, a joint effort between SUNY Upstate Medical University and Syracuse University, two students were selected for placement at the Poison Center to: conduct a needs assessment and to design, develop and implement an educational intervention with health educators at our 54 county Health Departments as our target audience.

The needs assessment included a survey. The survey results informed the design of the educational intervention. As a result, the webinar consisted of a PowerPoint presentation and an introduction to the Health Educator's Toolkit (developed specifically for this intervention) containing: a copy of our Stop! Ask First DVD; a CD of information pertinent to outreach; a copy of our Upstate New York Newsletter; 3 poison safety brochures, a magnet and a phone sticker with the 1-800 Helpline phone number. Following the webinar an online evaluation was conducted.

In an effort to promote continued collaboration, the participants were introduced to the UNYPC website as a resource and encouraged to report their efforts to their Health Departments and to the Poison Center, using a newly designed "outreach log". A monthly email will serve as a reminder to forward the log, listing their poison prevention outreach efforts conducted in the communities we mutually serve.

In using this relatively new technology as a vehicle for delivering Poison Center public education and in utilizing Health Departments as our conduit, we are hoping to inform future direction of public education at Poison Centers.

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## Protect Your Children, Yourself, and Your Investment by Preventing Lead Poisoning

Ann Barnett, Public Health Educator, Onondaga County Health Department

Lead poisoning can be prevented. The most common cause is lead paint. If disturbed, lead paint can turn into lead dust that can't be seen. This lead dust can get on your child's hands and then into his or her mouth.

### If lead gets into a child's body, it could cause:

- Learning problems
- Behavior problems
- Growth problems
- Hearing loss
- Kidney damage
- Anemia

### Protect your children from lead poisoning:

- Have your child tested for lead at age one and again at age two.
- Young children often put their hands into their mouth. Wash children's hands often, especially before eating and before bedtime.
- Wash toys, pacifiers, and bottles in hot soapy water after each use, even if they don't look dirty.
- Plumbing in older homes may contain lead. Run the cold water a few minutes before using for drinking, cooking, and preparing baby formula.
- Mop floors often with a damp mop and use disposable wipes or wet paper towels to clean windowsills. It is important to not vacuum lead paint chips because this can cause lead dust to circulate throughout your home.
- Do not use imported pottery, crystal, or pewter for storing food or liquids as they may contain lead.
- Feed children foods rich in protein, Vitamin C, iron, and calcium. Good nutrition helps prevent lead from being absorbed into the body.
- Check the Consumer's Product Safety Commission website [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) for product recalls on toys, jewelry and more.



### Protect yourself and protect your home:

Before renting or buying a house built before 1978, read the lead disclosure rule pamphlet: "Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home". This pamphlet has important information about how to safely own and repair an older home, visit [www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/lead).

Keep your home in good condition by repairing any peeling or chipping paint. When paying for work to be done, only hire EPA certified contractors. For a list of certified contractors, visit [www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/renovation](http://www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/renovation).

If you plan to do home repairs yourself, learn how to protect yourself and how to remodel safely using wet methods to contain lead dust. If you have a child under age six who lives at or visits your home regularly, you may qualify for a **Community Development Grant** to remove lead and increase the value of your home.

Call your local health department for more information.

- Have fuel heating equipment and chimneys inspected by a professional every year before the cold weather sets in.
- When using a fireplace, open the flue for adequate ventilation.
- Never use your oven or gas grill to heat your home, garage, closed-in porch, hunting cabin/ tent.
- Install CO alarms, with battery back up, in your home. Consider installing one on every level and replace detectors every seven years.
- If the CO alarm sounds, move to a fresh air location outdoors. Make sure everyone in the home is accounted for and call 911 for help.
- If you need to warm a vehicle, remove it from the garage immediately after starting it. Do not run a vehicle or other fueled engine or motor indoors, even if the garage door is open. Make sure the exhaust pipe is not covered in snow.
- During and after a snow storm, make sure vents for the dryer, furnace, stove and fireplace are clear of snow build up.
- Never use a generator inside your home – not even in the basement, garage or porch. Keep it outside, away from windows, doors and vent openings.

### **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.**