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## *Information for You from Your Health Care Team*

### **Childhood Poisonings**

It had been almost three months since the children had seen their grandparents when the Andersons decided to make the four hour drive back home. It was an exciting time with the kids growing so fast. They were curious and into exploring everything. Grandma and grandpa's house was new and full of surprises.

Then, when Mrs. Anderson and the children were doing the dishes, she left the kitchen to answer the telephone. She returned thirty seconds later to find her mother's bottle of pain reliever spilled on the kitchen table and five partially chewed pills on the floor. A sense of panic came over this usually calm mother as she tried to think what to do.

What should you do when your child has swallowed a harmful substance?

The first step in a suspected or known poison emergency is to call the Poison Control Center. In Central New York the number is 476-4766 or 1-800-252-5655.

Be prepared. The Central New York Regional Poison Control Center recommends that activated charcoal be available in every household. Activated charcoal is a specially processed form of charcoal that works in many poison emergencies by adhering to the poison or drug. The activated charcoal/poison complex is then eliminated from the body undigested.

Administer the activated charcoal only after calling the Poison Control Center and being told that is what should be done. When activated charcoal is recommended, you will also be instructed to go to an Emergency Room. However, by administering activated charcoal at home or on the way to the Emergency Room, you can save valuable time. It will prevent the potentially harmful substance from getting into the bloodstream.

Activated charcoal is available at most pharmacies for less than seven dollars. It comes as a dry powder which is then mixed with water or soda. The reconstituted mixture is black in color but virtually tasteless. Most children will drink it easily with a straw. Care, however, does need to be taken not to spill the mixture because it can stain. If there is more than one child in the household, there should be a bottle for each child.

The Poison Control Center still recommends keeping syrup of ipecac on hand because different poisons require different modes of treatment.

For further information contact the Central New York Regional Poison Control Center at 476-4766 or 1-800-252-5655. Someone is available for both poison emergencies and poison information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Tracy Hurteau, MD is a pediatric resident at SUNY Upstate Medical University