

Accidental Poisoning

How can poisoning accidents be prevented?

As toddlers put anything and everything in their mouths, it

How many children are unintentionally poisoned?

In 2002 in the UK:

- Almost 31,500 children aged under 15 went to hospital after suspected poisoning – over 26,000 of these were under five years old
- About 7,000 children under 15 were admitted to hospital, a very high proportion of admissions when compared with other types of accidents.
- The great majority of admissions were for one day or an overnight stay
- 69% of the admissions were associated with medicines – a quarter of these being commonly used drugs such as analgesics.
- 6 children died of accidental poisoning in 2002. One of these children was under five years old.

Babies and toddlers learn about the world around them by touching and tasting. This means they are likely put anything in their mouths and are therefore at risk of poisoning.



is necessary to make sure that they

do not have access to poisonous substances.

Household chemicals and medicines should be stored out of the sight and reach of young children – preferably in a locked cupboard.

Garden or DIY products should also be kept in a locked shed or cupboard.

Accidents have happened when adults have put medicines in the fridge. The labels on medicines often state that they should be kept in a cool place. This means away from heat sources such as radiators or direct sunlight. It is confusing for children if products that are not safe to eat or drink are kept in the fridge or in cupboards where food is normally kept.

All medicines or household chemicals should be kept in their original containers. This helps children both children and adults

recognise dangerous substances. Warning labels and instructions are vital for using products safely. Child-resistant closures are also very important, as they have significantly reduced the number of

eaten and should be kept well out of the reach of young children. Cosmetics can be poisonous to young children. Products such as perfume, nail varnish remover and hairspray can be harmful if



childhood poisonings since their introduction. It is important however to be aware that they are child-resistant, not child-proof and that many four or five year olds can undo these tops. Child resistant caps work by slowing down rather than preventing a child's access to dangerous substances.

What types of substances can be harmful to children?

Medicines are responsible for many suspected poisoning cases. Painkillers are the most frequent cause of poisoning but children have also been taken to hospital after swallowing tranquilisers, anti-depressants, vitamins and sleeping pills.

Household and garden chemicals can also be harmful if swallowed. Everyday products such as bleach, disinfectant, dishwasher powder and other cleaning products can cause burns to the mouth, throat and stomach and may also be highly toxic. Glues, solvents and aerosols can cause burns or sickness if they are inhaled.

Alcohol can be very dangerous for young children. Cigarettes and tobacco can also cause sickness if

swallowed and many have a high alcohol content. Essential oils can also be poisonous if swallowed.

What should you do if a child swallows something harmful?

It is a good idea for parents and others who care for babies or young children to learn basic first aid.

If a child may have swallowed something poisonous it is important to get advice from a doctor, hospital or NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

Do not try to make the child vomit. If taking a child to the doctor or hospital, take the bottle, packet or any remaining pills with you.

