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March Is Illinois Poison Prevention Month

Nation's oldest poison center offers resources for parents and caregivers

Harm reduction is a year-round endeavor for Illinois Poison Center (IPC) staff. But in March, Illinois Poison Prevention Month, IPC encourages all Illinoisans to learn about the potential hazards lurking in homes, schools and workplaces. By raising awareness about poisoning harm, IPC seeks to educate and empower the public with the information needed to protect themselves and their loved ones.

“It’s crucial to remind Illinoisans of the safety hazards they interact with every day—and how to prevent illness and injury,” says IPC Medical Director Michael Wahl, M.D. “We encourage parents to visit the Illinois Poison Center’s website and examine their home for potential risks and hazardous substances that may be in reach of children.”

Each year, IPC handles approximately 80,000 cases regarding potentially harmful substances ranging from minor to severe. Poisonings can occur after exposure to medication, plants, household chemicals, automotive products, insect stings, lead, carbon monoxide and more.

Illinoisans of all ages are encouraged to review educational IPC’s resources (<https://www.illinoispoisoncenter.org/resources>), including:

- A complimentary safety packet featuring a sticker, magnet and first aid tips for poisonings;
- A video library; and
- Blog posts tackling urgent concerns.

Children are especially vulnerable to choking or accidental ingestions, but adults are at risk too. Poisoning—including drug overdoses and carbon monoxide—was the leading cause of injury-related death for adults 25-64 years old in Illinois, outranking motor vehicle crashes and firearms, according to the state of Illinois’ *2018-2022 State Strategic Plan to Prevent Injury*,

Violence, and Suicide. Hospitalizations and emergency department visit rates due to poisoning are also highest among adults ages 25-64 compared to other age groups.

IPC encourages the public to participate in Illinois Poison Prevention Month by:

- Sharing IPC's website (<https://www.illinoispoisoncenter.org>) with friends and family;
- Completing IPC's free online poison prevention course (<https://www.illinoispoisoncenter.org/education/poison-prevention-education>);
- Posting on social media using #preventpoison; and
- Raising awareness about IPC's toll-free, confidential expert helpline service (800-222-1222).

"Prevention is the key word," says IPC Assistant Vice President Carol DesLauriers, Pharm.D. "Through our helpline and educational outreach, we prevent about 30,000 unnecessary emergency department visits every year—saving money for both patients and taxpayers."

DesLauriers is also president-elect of the American Association of Poison Control Centers, which recognizes National Poison Prevention Week from March 21-27.

IPC staff serve as toxicology consultants to Illinois healthcare professionals, whose inquiries represent nearly one-third of yearly poisoning cases. IPC's toxicology specialists, who serve both English- and Spanish-speakers, resolve over 90% of poison exposure cases over the phone, eliminating the need for referral to a healthcare facility. Calls to the IPC helpline (1-800-222-1222) are free and confidential. IPC experts are available to provide information and treatment advice 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, including holidays.

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The Illinois Poison Center is a nonprofit health service that provides the people of Illinois with comprehensive and trusted information and treatment advice on potentially harmful substances via a free, confidential 24-hour helpline staffed by specially trained physicians, nurses and pharmacists.