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Educate Yourself with the IPC During Illinois Poison Prevention Month
Nation's oldest poison center offers resources to prevent harmful exposures

This week, the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) kicks off Illinois Poison Prevention Month, which serves as a timely reminder of the substantial harm poisoning can cause to the young and old alike. The issue may not make headline news every day, but the danger to the public can't be ignored: In Illinois, more people are hospitalized for poisoning than for injuries from firearms and motor vehicle collisions combined.

“Last year, the IPC managed nearly 77,000 cases regarding potentially harmful substances, and more than 40 percent of those involved children five years of age and under,” says Michael Wahl, M.D., medical director, IPC. “While children are one of the most at-risk populations for poisoning, it is crucial that we raise awareness among all ages.”

As part of its campaign to prevent exposures to potentially harmful substances, the IPC offers some important questions all Illinoisans should ask—and the answers that can help save lives.

What Substances Cause Poisoning?

“Poison” means more than chemicals in a laboratory. Everyday products—from medications and vitamins to plants and cosmetics—can cause an unexpected reaction and be toxic if used or ingested incorrectly.

Last year, the substances most frequently involved in IPC cases included:

- Analgesics (painkillers): 11,207 cases;
- Sedative hypnotics/antipsychotics: 7,282 cases;
- Cleaning substances: 5,680 cases;
- Cosmetics/personal care products: 5,191 cases;
- Antidepressants: 5,076 cases;
- Alcohols: 3,988 cases;
- Antihistamines: 3,680 cases;

- Cardiovascular drugs: 3,480 cases;
- Foreign objects like button batteries and magnets: 2,741 cases; and
- Anticonvulsants: 2,502 cases.

How Does the IPC Help Treat and Prevent Poisoning?

A call to the IPC's toll-free, confidential helpline (800-222-1222) is the first line of defense when someone suspects they or someone they know have been exposed to a potentially harmful substance. By providing treatment advice over the phone, IPC experts manage 90 percent of poison exposure calls from the public at the site of exposure, eliminating the need for a referral to a healthcare facility. This prevented an estimated 30,000 emergency department visits in 2017.

The general public isn't the only group that takes advantage of the IPC's unique expertise. More than one-third of the IPC's exposure cases come from healthcare facilities around the state. Emergency and admitting physicians and hospital staff depend on IPC recommendations when treating complex poisoning cases. By working directly with the public and healthcare organizations, the IPC saves the people of Illinois \$60 million annually.

The IPC does more than save lives after an exposure to a potentially harmful substance has occurred. Recognizing that education is a critical component in reducing—and preventing—the damaging effects of poisoning in the state, Illinois Poison Prevention Month is among the IPC's most important initiatives. As proclaimed by [Governor Bruce Rauner](#) and [Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel](#), the project aims to spread information about poison prevention to families and communities throughout March. Hundreds of complimentary public education events are scheduled across the state.

How Can I Get Involved?

IPC staff and volunteers distribute educational information and promotional items to tens of thousands of Illinoisans to give them the tools and strategies to create safer home, work and learning environments, as well as raise awareness about the toll-free, confidential expert helpline service for children and adults. In addition, the IPC will provide complimentary poison prevention education and promotion materials to those who complete the IPC's free online [Poison Prevention Education Course](#) and order before March 16. [Click here](#) to get involved in Illinois Poison Prevention Month.

All year round, the IPC encourages residents to take advantage of videos, activity sheets and other educational materials available on the [IPC website](#) and the [IPC blog](#). These include "[My Child Ate...](#)" an online library of potentially harmful substances often ingested by children. The page is an informational resource as parents and caregivers increasingly turn to the internet to search "my child ate..."

IPC experts are available to provide information and treatment advice 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, including holidays. If you suspect that you or someone you know has been exposed to a potentially harmful substance, please call the IPC at 800-222-1222. The call is confidential and free for the caller. To make sure the IPC's experts are always within reach, text "POISON" to 797979 to save the IPC's contact information in your smartphone. For more information, visit the IPC's website: <http://illinoispoisoncenter.org>.

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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 toll-free, confidential 24-hour helpline staffed by specially trained physicians, nurses and pharmacists. 2018 marks the 65th anniversary of the nation's oldest poison center. [Click here](#) to learn more about the Illinois Poison Center and its mission.