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March is 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 people of all ages. The issue may not make headline news every day, but the danger to the public can't be ignored. According to the Illinois Dept. of Public Health injury statistics, more people are hospitalized in Illinois 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," said Michael Wahl, M.D., medical director, IPC. "While children are the most at-risk populations for poisoning exposures, adults are most at risk for severe injuries due to poisoning. It is crucial that we raise awareness among all ages."

IPC staff and volunteers distribute educational information and promotional items to Illinoisans statewide, giving them tools and strategies to create safer homes, play areas, work spaces and learning environments, and also raising awareness about the toll-free, confidential expert helpline service (800-222-1222) 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 18 [Click here](#) to get involved in Illinois Poison Prevention Month.

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; it is used to describe an exposure to any substance that may be harmful to humans. 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): 10,809 cases;
- Sedative hypnotics/antipsychotics: 6,773 cases;
- Cleaning substances such as laundry soap and toilet bowl cleaner: 5,719 cases;
- Antidepressants: 5,309 cases;
- Cosmetics/personal care products: 5,142 cases;
- Alcohols: 3,983 cases;
- Antihistamines: 3,706 cases;
- Cardiovascular drugs: 3,595 cases;
- Foreign objects like toys and magnets: 3,020 cases; and
- Stimulants and other street drugs: 2,827

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 action to take when someone may 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 trip to the emergency department. This prevented an estimated 30,000 emergency department visits in 2018.

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 hospitals around the state. 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.

Recognizing that education is a critical component in reducing—and preventing—the damaging effects of poisoning, Illinois Poison Prevention Month is among the IPC's most important initiatives. As proclaimed by [Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker](#) 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?

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 immediately. The call is free and confidential. 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. [Click here](#) to learn more about the Illinois Poison Center and its mission.