



222 S. Riverside Plaza Ph 312.906.6136
Suite 1900 Fax 312.627.8006
Chicago, IL 60606 TDD 312.906.6185
www.illinoispoisoncenter.org

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Contact: Robin Antognoli 312-906-6146

Avoid Medication Errors by Calling Poison Center Experts

(Chicago) – According to a report released by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) on Thursday, medication errors harm 1.5 million people and kill several thousand each year in the United States. Illinois Poison Center experts can help reduce those numbers with their around-the-clock poison prevention and treatment advice.

“Our poison specialists, most of them pharmacists, nurses and physicians, are more than capable to help consumers with questions and concerns regarding their medications,” said Dr. Michael Wahl, managing medical director of the Illinois Poison Center. “Illinois Poison Center staff can assist callers who have made an error in taking their medications or are experiencing side effects from their medicines.”

In 2004, more than 222,000 therapeutic errors were reported to U.S. poison control centers nationally.

Speak Up – Take an Active Role in Your Health

Poison center experts urge Illinois residents to be diligent when it comes to their health care. With four of every five U.S. adults taking at least one medication every day, and almost a third taking at least five, all consumers need to be proactive in their health to reduce the risk of medication errors. Take an active role in your health care by following this advice:

- Bring a list of all medications you are currently taking, including herbal supplements and vitamins, and discuss them with your doctor. A medication journal is available at www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org.
- Make sure you can read any prescription given to you. If you cannot, ask your doctor for clarification and take notes on a separate piece of paper. You may need to share this information with the pharmacist.
- Ask your doctor the name of the medication prescribed, and what it does.
- Find out how often you should take it, and under what conditions (before bed, with food, not before certain activities, etc.)
- Ask about any possible side effects.
- Understand all directions given to you. If you do not, be sure to ask questions.
- Double-check the prescription given to you by the pharmacist – do not "assume" it is correct. Check the name on the box or bottle.

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Prevent Medication Mishaps – Follow Directions

Some medicine-related poisonings occur when the wrong dose of medicine is taken. The following tips will help ensure the correct dosage is taken and avoid a potential poisoning:

- Understand the directions and follow them exactly. Call your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions.
- Always use the measuring device that comes with the medicine or a device that shows exact amounts. Know the difference between a teaspoon (tsp) and a tablespoon (Tbs).
- Do not chew, crush or break capsules or tablets unless the doctor or pharmacist says to do so.
- If you take more than one type of medicine, be able to tell them apart.
- Adults should give all medicine to young children; never allow children to take it themselves
- **When in doubt, call the Illinois Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.**

Additional medicine safety information

The Illinois Poison Center offers free medicine safety advice on its Web site, www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org under the Poisoning Hazards section. An informative medicine safety brochure and other useful poison prevention information are also included in the IPC's complimentary packet of poison safety information, which is available to all Illinois residents. Get one today by visiting the poison center Web site or calling the Illinois Poison Center hot line at 1-800-222-1222.

Getting help in an emergency

If you suspect a poisoning, do not wait for symptoms to appear. Contact the Illinois Poison Center immediately at 1-800-222-1222. Post this number in a highly visible and central location year-round.

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Editor's Note: Poison center experts are available for news media interviews. Contact the IPC public affairs at 312-906-6146 to arrange an interview.

The Illinois Poison Center serves all of Illinois – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – via a national, toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222. Staffed by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and poison information providers, the IPC provides poison prevention information and treatment advice on household products, medication issues, alcohol and drug misuse, bites and stings and other poisonings.

The IPC is a program of the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, an association comprising more than 140 hospitals and health care organizations working together to improve the delivery of health care services in the Chicago area.