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Celebrate Safely - Prevent Poisonings this Fourth of July

(Chicago) – Experts at the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) urge safety during the Fourth of July holiday. Everyday items can turn into poisoning hazards in the face of a hectic holiday celebration.

“Poisonings most often occur when normal routines are interrupted, as is the case during parties and celebrations,” explains Michael Wahl, MD, managing medical director, IPC. “Common products, and even food, can be a poisoning risk if proper supervision and precautions are not taken.”

Glow Sticks, Common Poisoning Hazard

Glow sticks are one of the products that generate the most calls to the IPC during the Fourth of July holiday. The IPC received more than 730 calls regarding glow sticks last year alone. The liquid contained inside the tube is generally considered non-toxic. However, it can be a skin, eye and stomach irritant, and the liquid can cause irritation, swelling and pain around the mouth. Ingestions of the liquid can result in persistent nausea and vomiting. “Young children put all sorts of things in their mouths, and these products are no exception. Parents should watch their children closely, and make sure that the glow sticks do not leak,” said Wahl. “If the fluid gets on the skin, immediately wash the affected area with soap and water.”

Charcoal and lighter fluid, Dangerous Hydrocarbons

Self-lighting charcoal and lighter fluid are dangerous products can cause serious injury when inhaled into the lungs. These products are considered hydrocarbons, and when breathed in can lead to serious respiratory problems. In the most serious cases, these types of poisonings could result in death, based on a number of factors involving how an individual’s body processes the fluids.

Fireworks Pose Poisoning Risk

Fireworks, which are illegal in Illinois except at professional displays, pose both burn and poisoning risks. They are considered extremely toxic if ingested. Some fireworks contain nitrates and chlorates,

which can impair the body's ability to carry oxygen in the blood. Fireworks also can contain barium salts, which can trigger seizures.

Food Safety is Common Sense

Alcohol- and food-related poisonings are commonplace during holiday festivities. Unfinished alcoholic beverages are of particular risk to children and can be very dangerous, even fatal, to small children as alcohol can cause low blood sugar. IPC experts remind parents to place alcoholic beverages out of the reach of children. Symptoms of an alcohol overdose may be mild, such as stimulation, dizziness and nausea, or they may progress to more serious complications, such as vomiting, drowsiness, difficulty breathing, coma and even death.

Food poisoning, a common occurrence during this typically warm-weather holiday, is caused by bacteria, which grows in certain foods, such as mayonnaise-containing products, when they are not handled, cooked or stored properly. Symptoms of the most common types of food poisoning may include nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhea and fever. One or more of these symptoms usually develop within a few hours to a few days after eating the contaminated food.

To stay safe, the IPC recommends the following tips:

- Pack hot foods in insulated containers so they stay hot.
- Pack refrigerated foods just before leaving home; use well-insulated coolers that allow space for ice.
- If grilling, pack additional clean plates to avoid cross-contamination of raw and cooked foods.
- Cook foods as close to serving time as possible to limit bacterial growth.
- Refrigerate food within two hours after cooking.

If you suspect a poisoning from any of the hazards above, call the Illinois Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 right away. Do not wait for symptoms to appear.

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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.