Safe Lawn and Garden Practices

Warmer weather means planting season, which also means an increase in the use of pesticides in and around homes, gardens and farms. Everyone will want to keep poison prevention in mind when deciding what to plant and how to avoid springtime pesticide hazards, such as the chemicals used to kill weeds, insects and rodents.

Each year, the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) handles thousands of poisoning cases. The most commonly reported lawn and garden dangers included outdoor plants and mushrooms; insecticides and pesticides; rodenticides; insect bites; and fertilizers.

Since poisonous plants are commonly kept as houseplants or used for landscaping, the IPC frequently receives calls related to accidental plant exposures. To prevent a plant poisoning, you should know the names of all your plants, both indoors and outdoors, and label each plant with the correct common and botanical name. The IPC recommends that you consult with a local greenhouse, nursery or florist to identify unknown plants.

Naturally, the IPC receives more emergency and information calls regarding plants, mushrooms and pesticides during the warmer months. Taking a few simple precautions will allow adults, children and pets alike to enjoy the outdoors safely.

To help prevent a plant poisoning, follow these safety tips:

- Identify and label all of your indoor and outdoor plants with the correct common and botanical names
- Teach your children never to put mushrooms, berries or any part of a plant in their mouths
- Do not assume a plant is non-toxic because birds or wildlife eat it
- Keep the IPC phone number (1-800-222-1222) on or near all telephones
- Keep a bottle of both syrup of ipecac and activated charcoal for each child in the home. Syrup of ipecac is used to induce vomiting, while activated charcoal binds with the swallowed poison, allowing the body to eliminate it naturally. Different toxins require different treatments, however, so never use either product without first calling the IPC or a doctor.
One of the most common problems regarding pesticide poisonings occurs when people mix or dilute the pesticide and prepare more than they require for one application. Rather than properly disposing of the leftover pesticide, people often store the prepared amount in an unmarked bucket or container for future use; this can cause children or adults to mistake the product for something else. You should always store pesticides in the original containers, complete with labels that list ingredients, directions for use and first-aid steps in case of an accidental exposure.

**To help prevent a pesticide poisoning, follow these safety tips:**

- Read the directions on each container, since every chemical is different
- Follow the specified directions for mixing solutions and rinsing spray containers
- Wear protective clothing when applying pesticides (gloves, glasses, long sleeves and pants)
- Never apply pesticides outdoors on a windy day. Position yourself so that the wind will not blow pesticide spray or dust into your face
- Keep children and pets away during application and until the product dries, or as directed on the label
- Store pesticides in their original containers and out of reach in a cool, dry place
- Dispose of the remaining pesticide as directed and rinse out the empty container
- Wipe down any household or garden tools that may have been exposed to the pesticide
- Wash your hands with soap and change your clothes after applying a pesticide
- Keep the IPC phone number (1-800-222-1222) on or near all telephones

Approximately 80 percent of poisonings can be treated safely and effectively at home. If you suspect a plant or pesticide exposure has occurred, begin administering the following first-aid treatment recommendations; then call your local poison center. (The nationwide, toll-free poison center number, 1-800-222-1222, automatically connects callers with their designated local poison center, from anywhere in the U.S. All calls placed in Illinois will be routed to the IPC.)

- **Exposure to the mouth:** Give the victim a small amount of water.
- **Exposure to the skin:** Wash skin with soap and cool water immediately. Remove any contaminated clothing.
- **Exposure to the eyes:** Rinse eyes with lukewarm water for 15 minutes.