



**For Immediate Release**  
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**Calls to Illinois Poison Center Up July through October**  
*Warmer weather, outdoor activities increase poisoning hazards*

**(Chicago)** – The Illinois Poison Center (IPC) hot line experiences a 14 percent increase in calls, on average, between July and October when compared to winter months. This trend routinely concerns poison center experts because the calls relate to similar poison risks year after year: unsafe handling of food, alcoholic-related poisonings, exposure to charcoal and lighter fluid and fireworks hazards.

"Poisonings are preventable," said Dr. Michael Wahl, administrative medical director of the IPC. "Because many people spend more time outdoors during the summertime, in extreme heat and at events with food such as picnics and barbecues, they increase their risk of a potential poisoning."

"Often, increased alcohol consumption also is involved, which puts both children and adults in harm's way," he added. "We urge the public to be more aware of the dangers associated with outdoor activities."

Individuals should call the IPC at 1-800-222-1222 immediately if they suspect a poisoning. Free poison prevention information, such as telephone stickers and brochures, are available online at [www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org](http://www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org) or by calling 1-800-222-1222.

***Food Poisoning: its causes, symptoms and prevention***

- Food poisoning is caused by bacteria, which grow in certain foods when they are not handled, cooked or stored properly. Some common sources of food-borne illness include gravy, dairy-based products and meats.
- 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.
- A simple rule to follow to stay safe from food bacteria is to keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. Additional tips to properly prepare, cook and store foods include:
  - Pack hot foods in insulated containers so they stay hot.
  - Pack refrigerated foods just before leaving home.
  - Wash counters and utensils before and after preparing foods.
  - Wash your hands with hot soapy water before you start to cook, and each time after you touch raw foods, such as chicken and hamburgers.
  - Wash all fruits and vegetables before serving.
  - Do not place cooked food on the same plate as raw food.
  - Cook food adequately, and as close to serving time as possible to limit bacterial growth.
  - Food should not be left out at room temperature more than 2 hours (1 hour if the temperature is above 90°F).
  - If the odor or color of any food is poor or questionable, do not eat it – throw it out.

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***Alcohol Poisoning: who is most at risk, symptoms and prevention***

- Children are more apt to drink unfinished alcoholic beverages during summer events and holidays, when parties and celebrations are taking place. Alcohol can be very dangerous, even fatal, to small children, as well as to pets.
- Symptoms of an alcohol overdose may be mild, such as stimulation, dizziness and nausea; symptoms may progress to more serious complications, such as vomiting, drowsiness, difficulty breathing, coma and death.
- Place alcoholic beverages, such as beer and wine coolers, up high and out of the reach of children. Discard all unfinished alcoholic beverages immediately.

***Charcoal and Lighter Fluids (for grills): hazards and toxicity***

Many people use self-lighting charcoal and lighter fluid when barbecuing. These products may become dangerous when breathed into the lungs. They are considered hydrocarbons, which can coat the lungs and create serious respiratory problems and, potentially, lead to death. Charcoal can pose a choking hazard. Always use caution when grilling. Never add lighter fluid to existing hot or warm coals and remember to put lighter fluid and charcoal products away immediately after use.

***Firework Hazards: hazards and toxicity***

Fireworks are illegal in Illinois except at professional displays, and they can be both burn and poisoning risks. Some fireworks can be extremely toxic if ingested. Fireworks containing nitrates and chlorates can impair the body's ability to carry oxygen in the blood. Other fireworks can contain barium salts, which may trigger seizures.

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The Illinois Poison Center (IPC) is the only certified, regional poison center in Illinois, serving more than 12 million residents in 102 counties – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – via a national, toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222.

Calling the toll-free hot line will connect callers with their designated local poison center at any time from anywhere in the United States; all calls placed in Illinois are routed to the IPC. Staffed by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and poison information providers, the IPC provides poison prevention information and treatment advice to the public and health care professionals on household products, alcohol or drug misuse, medication problems, bites and stings, occupational accidents and other poisonings. The IPC is a program of the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, an association of more than 140 hospitals and health care organizations working together to improve the quality of health care services in the Chicago area.