

Staying safe starts at home

In order to help raise awareness of the risk of being poisoned by household products, medicines, pesticides and plants, National Poison Prevention Week will be observed from March 19-25 this year.

More than 90% of human exposures reported to poison centers happen in the home. However, by following these poison-prevention tips, you can keep your home safe and your family healthy:

1. Put all medications in your home in safe locations that are away and out of sight from children. This includes vitamins, supplements and over-the-counter and prescription medications. Safely dispose of expired or unneeded medication. Although you should make sure all medications are in child-resistant packaging, it's important to remember that nothing is truly child-proof.
2. Install and check carbon monoxide detectors in your home. Carbon monoxide is a colorless and odorless gas that can lead to severe illness and even death. Most carbon monoxide exposures occur during the winter months or during power outages. Change batteries in your detector during the spring and fall.
3. Be aware of small items that children can swallow, such as batteries, buttons, toys and game pieces. Keep small ingestible objects off the floor and out of reach for babies and toddlers.
4. Make sure all cleaning and laundry products are kept in their original containers and stored in locations that are hard to reach for children. Label each product with the word "Caution" if possible.
5. Keep all oil or lubricants, such as engine oil, fragrance oils, personal care products and hand sanitizers, in their original containers and store them in a safe area.
6. To prevent food poisoning, keep raw meats, eggs and poultry separate from other foods in grocery bags, on the counter and during preparation. Use a food thermometer to check if meat is fully cooked and has reached the internal temperature required to kill harmful bacteria. Refrigerate leftovers within two hours to reduce the risk of bacterial growth. Consume or freeze within three to four days.

If you suspect you or a loved one has been poisoned by any items in your home, you should immediately call the Poison Help Line at **1-800-222-1222**. Display this phone number in your home and at work in case of an emergency or if you have questions. You can also text **POISON** to **797979** to save the number in your mobile phone. Calls are free, confidential and answered by experts 24 hours a day, seven days a week.