

Poison Center alerts families to 11 holiday dangers

syracuse.com/news/2011/12/poison_center_alerts_families.html

By James T. Mulder | jmulder@syracuse.com

December 21, 2011



Holly berries are toxic and, if eaten, can be fatal to a child, according to the Upstate New York Poison Center.

Syracuse, N.Y. -- The Upstate New York Poison Center has issued an alert for families to be aware of these potential holiday dangers:

*Button batteries. The American Association of Poison Control Centers reports 3,500 button battery ingestion cases every year in the United States, many involving children. Button batteries can become lodged in the esophagus and digestive tract. If ingested, button batteries can give off an electrical charge and cause internal tissue burning.

*Medications. The holiday season coincides with cold and flu season. Medications (over-the-counter and prescription) often resemble candy. As an example, small red decongestant pills look like edible red dot candies used for holiday food decorations.

*Alcoholic beverages. Alcoholic-based drinks, such as vodka and cranberry juice, can often be mistaken for juice by a child.

*Lamp oil and incense/reed diffusers. To a child, these liquids can look like a drink. In addition, they are often made to smell like foods, such as vanilla, spice, gingerbread and cinnamon.

*Bubble lights. These holiday lights can contain methylene chloride or alcohol, which if ingested can be harmful. Vintage ornaments often contain lead or other heavy metals and are also harmful if swallowed.

*Super glue. Super glue packaging, often used for holiday crafts, can resemble eye drops.

*Snow sprays. Although the substance that creates the faux snow is non-toxic, the propellant used to express the product from the container is toxic and harmful if ingested.

*Poinsettia. While this holiday favorite is considered non-toxic, the white milky liquid from the stem can cause skin irritation.

*Holly. Holly berries are toxic and ingestion of 20 berries can be fatal to a child.

*Jerusalem Cherry. All parts of this plant are toxic and can be harmful if swallowed.

*Mistletoe. Sometimes called the “kiss of death,” mistletoe leaves, stem and berries are all toxic.

The Upstate New York Poison Center strongly recommends that all of the above items should be kept out of the reach of children at all times. The Upstate New York Poison Center encourages people to program the national Poison Center helpline (1-800-222-1222) into their cellphones. The Poison Center welcomes emergency exposure calls as well as informational calls. Poison Centers give 24-hour access to toxicologists 365 days a year.

The Upstate New York Poison Center, which handles more than 85,000 calls annually, is affiliated with Upstate Medical University.