

April 5, 2012

Common Products That Can Poison Children

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According to the [American Association of Poison Control Centers](#), approximately half of all poison exposures involve children younger than 6.

Most parents are pretty good at identifying and keeping their children safe from obvious toxins, from cleaning fluid to blood thinners. But many common household items, not to mention the contents of mom's purse, are attractive and potentially lethal.

In his job as director of the Toxics Epidemiology Program for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Dr. Cyrus Rangan tracks and responds to toxic exposures and consults with patients exposed to toxins. Following is his list of common products that pose a poison threat, and why.

- Button batteries (for hearing aids, watches, etc.) can get lodged in the airway or the esophagus, causing third degree burns and bleeding. Note that these [potentially lethal button batteries](#) can even be found in toys.
- Chewing gum is generally safe, but a young child can choke on pieces of gum. Nicotine gum is very poisonous to young children.
- Cough drops taste sweet and might seem like candy, but they can be very dangerous. Medications like dextromethorphan, which can be found in many cough syrups, can be harmful among others. Also, kids can choke on cough drops.
- Sanitary gel can be 60 percent alcohol (120 proof) and can be very dangerous. A kid a couple small shots of hard liquor.
- Cigarettes carry a unique smell and taste that is attractive to children. Nicotine poisoning can result if they ingest a cigarette.

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- Nail polish remover can cause gastrointestinal distress, and can be even more harmful if vomited and inhaled into the airways. These products seldom come in child-resistant containers.
- Pepper spray can be extremely irritating to the eyes, mouth, throat and lungs of anyone, but it's worse for children, and such devices are easily deployed by accident.
- "Gummy" vitamins look and taste like candy. Although toxicity is likely to be low, there's a larger issue here of referring to medicine as candy. Children should learn that medicine is medicine, candy is candy and confusing them is dangerous.
- Over-the-counter medications, like cough drops and gummy vitamins, are often colorful, coated with sweetener and mistaken for candy. Some can be just as dangerous to a young child as prescription medications. We've tracked the checkered history of one such notable example, [acetaminophen](#).
- Prescription medications that aren't stored safely away from youngsters are hazardous. [We've addressed this hazard](#), and the fact that many can kill a 2-year-old in a single dose. Never store them in a container other than what they came in.

If your child has ingested a toxic product or substance, or has a reaction to something he or she has touched, contact the National Capital Poison Center at (800) 222-1222. If you think your child might have swallowed a button battery, go to the nearest emergency room.

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