

poison prevention press

Changes in Calls to the MPC

The types of calls coming into the MPC are changing. The number of calls about children under the age of 6 years has been dropping over the past few years. They are being replaced with more serious calls about medication misuse, abuse and overdose in teens, adults and seniors. In 2012, the MPC managed more patients in a health care facility than in 2011. While there were fewer deaths recorded by the MPC in 2012 than in 2011, there were more cases that had serious effects. The MPC is a valuable partner in the management of poisonings and overdoses. The specially trained pharmacists and nurses are true poison experts whether their patient is a 2 year old who ate a bug or a 50 year old who took an overdose of several prescription medicines.

Did you know that...

- In 2012, the Maryland Poison Center managed over 34,673 human exposure calls; 15,316 calls were about children under the age of 6 years.
- The top reason for calling the MPC about children under the age of 6 years continues to be personal care products.

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Kids Eat the Darnedest Things!

Do you ever wonder what motivates a child to put something in their mouth? Children learn by exploring. They look, they touch, they taste. And sometimes the things they taste are downright gross and disgusting. But are they harmful?

As the weather gets warmer, insects will begin to appear. Biting and stinging insects have been discussed in previous newsletter issues. But what happens if the children bite the insects? Stink Bugs smell bad, and that's all there is to it. They do not bite and they are harmless if a person swallows them. Cicadas may come out from hiding in some areas of Maryland. They are noisy, but not harmful. Once they come out of the ground, they attach to a hard surface so they can shed their outer skin. They then fly to the treetops to find a mate. Children and pets will often eat the outer skin as well as the live insect, but they are not harmful. If pets eat large quantities, a blockage may form, but they are not poisonous. Earthworms, lady bugs, and fireflies are also non-toxic. Caterpillars are not harmful when eaten, but their hairs may be irritating to the skin or mouth.

What motivates a child to eat poop? That is one of the great mysteries of parenthood. Horrified parents will call after finding the child they put down for a nap sitting in his crib eating poop out of his diaper. Others will call about dog, cat or wild animal poop that their child has sampled. Unless the child or animal was sick, eating a small amount of poop is not toxic. Cat litter is not a problem in small amounts. It can become a choking hazard or can cause a blockage in the intestines if larger quantities are eaten.

Have you ever lost track of your child's sippy cup only to have the child find it days or weeks later and drink the contents? This is definitely gross, but not terribly harmful. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea can develop. Usually the symptoms are short-lived and the child will do fine.

We regularly hear warnings about the safe handling of raw chicken and meat. The knife and cutting board used to cut raw meat should be washed thoroughly before cutting other food. Hands should be washed after handling raw meat. But what happens if your young child snatches a bite of the raw meat? In most cases, the child will do just fine. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea can develop. Usually the symptoms are short-lived, but if they persist, the pediatrician should be called.

Children will often share their food with the family pet so why shouldn't the family pet share their food with the child? Children will occasionally try the dog or cat food or treats. There is no harm in a child tasting pet food. However, if the pet is taking medicine and the medicine is mixed with the food, care should be taken to keep the child away from the dish.

People who use chewing tobacco need a place to spit the juices that build up in their mouth. They may use a cup or a soda/water bottle. Thirsty youngsters have been known to take a drink from these containers. Not only is this gross, it can be harmful. There is quite a bit of nicotine in these juices which can cause vomiting, affect a child's heart and cause seizures.

The pharmacists and nurses at the Maryland Poison Center are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 1-800-222-1222. Don't let the gross factor keep you from calling the poison center; chances are the specialist has helped another parent in the same situation!



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