



# POISONINGS IN CHILDREN

## The facts you need to know

Each year in Australia, about 3500 children are hospitalised because of poisoning. This makes poisoning the second most common reason why young children are admitted to hospital.

In addition, in Australia more than 240,000 calls are made annually to the Poisons Information Centre.

### What are the most common poisons?

#### 1. MEDICINES: both adult and children's

**Medicines are involved in more child poisoning than any other substances.**  
**Examples:**

- Paracetamol used for pain and fever (eg infant drops and syrup)
- Liquid cough and cold medicines
- Tablets and other medicines (eg contraceptive pills and antibiotics).

#### 2. COMMON HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

**Common household products are the second most common cause of child poisoning.**  
**Examples:**

- Household cleaners
- Rat baits, cockroach baits and garden sprays
- Mineral turpentine, kerosene and petrol
- Detergent for dishwasher machines.

#### Other poisons include:

- Eucalyptus oil
- Plants and mushrooms
- Cigarettes and cigarette butts.

### Who are most at risk?

**Toddlers** between 1 and 3 years because:

- they are extremely curious and active
- they tend to put everything in their mouths
- their tastebuds and sense of smell aren't developed to warn them that a substance is dangerous because it tastes or smells awful.

### How does child poisoning happen?

Children are more likely to access poisons when the poisons are:

- in use at the time
- before they have been put away safely or
- are left out for later use.

For example, do you ever:

- ▶ put medicines on a bedside table, even for a minute?
- ▶ use rat baits in the house?
- ▶ put shopping on the floor?
- ▶ use a vaporiser?
- ▶ leave medications in your handbag?

These are all situations where children can access poisons.





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**Most child poisoning occurs in and around the house.  
Here are some real examples:**

## Real Life Situations



- *Ella* drank paracetamol from a bottle left out on a low bedside table.

- *Erin* had green powder around her mouth. Mum thought *Erin* had reached behind the fridge and found and eaten a rat bait pellet.



- *John* licked his fingers after dipping them in a container with a paintbrush soaking in mineral turpentine.



- *Nicola* was playing in her grandmother's handbag, found a container of blood pressure tablets, took the lid off and swallowed some.

- *Grace* was seen to lick her fingers after playing with eucalyptus oil/vaporiser fluid in the vaporiser unit left on the floor in her bedroom.



- *Chloe's* dad brought home cleaner from work in a small juice bottle. While her mum had it out for cleaning, *Chloe* drank some.



## Ways to Prevent

- ✓ Always put medications away immediately after use, out of reach and sight, preferably locked away.
- ✓ Ensure the cap's child resistant closure is working correctly after each use.
- ✓ Use wax block rat baits, preferably those enclosed in plastic bait stations.
- ✓ Don't leave brushes to soak in mineral turpentine. Clean them immediately or keep them out of sight and reach of children until you can clean them properly.
- ✓ Keep visitors' handbags out of reach of young children.
- ✓ Ask your doctor if vaporiser fluids and chest rubs are necessary. (Medical opinion suggests that steam alone may be just as effective).
- ✓ Never transfer chemicals and cleaning products out of their original containers.

## If you suspect a poisoning:

- ❖ **Don't wait** for your child to look or feel sick.
- ❖ **Remain calm:** Not all poisonings require medical treatment. Some simply require observation at home.

❖ **Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 for advice. This service is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.**

- Where possible take the suspected poison to the phone.
- Do not give anything by mouth unless advised.

## Child poisoning can be prevented

Kidsafe recommends that medicines and household products are always stored safely, out of sight and reach of young children, preferably locked away.

Supervision of children is also important.

**Tip: Keep the Poisons Information Centre's phone number by your phone.**

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

[www.health.qld.gov.au/PoisonsInformationCentre/](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/PoisonsInformationCentre/)  
or for information on safe storage ideas call KIDSsafe on (07) 3854 1829 9am – 3pm Monday to Friday