

Poisons!

Preventing poisoning

We use 'poisons' every day to do all sorts of things around the home, from cleaning work surfaces to shampooing our hair. It's just important that we don't put them in our mouth, ingest or inhale them.

Poisons can affect us if we:

- swallow them or breath them in (as they enter our bloodstream and make us feel nauseous and ill)
- touch them (by irritating our skin or giving us a rash or chemical burn).

Containers of poisonous substances often display either an orange square with a black cross or a skull and crossbones symbol. They may also display words such as 'harmful', 'hazardous' or 'irritant'.

Poisons are particularly dangerous for babies, young children and pets, who like to explore, taste and smell everything and won't realise that a particular substance can harm them. For example, a toddler might see a bottle of tablets and think that they are sweets.

Some potential dangers:

Containers of chemicals - Bottles, sprays, tins and jars (e.g. cleaning fluids, petrol, glue, shampoo) should all use childproof seals and caps. Store poisonous containers in a locked cupboard or well out of reach of children. Read the label before using any product and use disposable gloves when touching cleaning powders and fluids.

Make-up and perfume - Although usually harmless when applied to the skin, make-up and perfume can be poisonous if swallowed and should not be left out (especially if young children or animals are likely to find and eat them). Make-up, like food, has a use-by date. It's important to replace things like lipstick, eyeliner and mascara when it's out of date or it can irritate the skin and cause infection.

Carbon Monoxide - The gas Carbon Monoxide is sometimes called the 'silent killer', as it cannot be seen, heard or even smelt, but it poisons the lungs. It can be released by faults in central heating systems and gas appliances, or by open fires if the chimney is blocked and the gas can't escape. Homes should be fitted with Carbon Monoxide alarms, which work like smoke alarms to detect traces of the gas.

Plants, berries and mushrooms - Certain plants, berries (e.g. holly) and mushrooms contain deadly poisons. Check first before eating anything growing in the wild.

Medicines and vitamin tablets - Although usually designed to make us well, medicine and tablets can be deadly. It's important to never take medicine that's either out of date or prescribed for someone else. Check with an adult before taking any medicine. Read the label and take the correct dosage.

Alcohol and tobacco - These are poisonous for the body and can cause illness or even death, particularly if taken by anyone under 18. They should never be left lying around.



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Poisons! (cont'd)

Case Study: Food poisoning

One of the most common home hazards is food poisoning. The Food Standards Agency claims that there are over 850,000 cases each year. You can get it through food that's unclean or out of date. Certain foods (like chicken, eggs, dairy foods, rice or pasta) contain toxins and bacteria that can cause sickness if the food hasn't been stored or cooked properly, or is reheated too many times.

It's important to:

- wash hands and clean kitchen work surfaces before and after touching food
- make sure plates and cutlery are kept clean, and regularly replace dishcloths
- use a separate chopping board for meat
- read labels to check how food should be stored and cooked, and to check 'best before' or 'use by' dates before using food
- cover any food that's left out
- throw away any leftover cooked food after two days.

