

Poisons!

Poisoning

The body can be poisoned in a number of different ways, usually involving a toxic (poisonous) substance entering the body through:

- **ingestion (swallowing)** – e.g. swallowing cleaning products, paints, glues, shampoos, perfume, alcohol, out-of-date medicine; eating toxic food or plants
- **inhalation (breathing in)** – e.g. chemical fumes like carbon monoxide, petrol, smoke
- **absorption (through the skin)** – e.g. cleaning products, pesticides, petrol
- **injection (by a needle or animal sting/bite)** – e.g. drugs and medications, wasp sting, spider or snake bite.

Once inside the body, the poison can then be carried in the bloodstream to affect all areas of the body.

Some of the symptoms of poisoning can include: pain or feeling of burning; feeling sick, numb or dizzy; headache; fever; difficulty breathing; muscle spasms; skin rash; and diarrhoea and vomiting (as the body often reacts automatically to get the poison out).

Key safety messages for the home and workplace:

- Young children and pets are particularly at risk from poisons, as they may touch, sniff or swallow something poisonous without understanding it can harm them.
- Keep all poisonous substances (including medicine, toiletries and make-up) out of reach or locked in a cupboard, and with lids on tight.
- Take medicine only as recommended by the chemist or doctor and don't give your prescribed medicine to anyone else. Don't take it in front of small children, in case they copy you.
- Avoid food poisoning by making sure food is clean, isn't out-of-date, and is stored and cooked according to instructions.
- Open the windows when using cleaning products, to get rid of the fumes, and don't mix chemical substances together. Wear rubber gloves to protect your hands.



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Poisons! (cont'd)

Basic First Aid

Chemical poisoning

- It's important to act quickly!
- Check that the person's airway, breathing and circulation are ok. You may need to treat burns (see the fact sheet **The Heat is On**).
- Lay the person down and try to keep him or her calm. Try to find out the type of poison taken.
- Don't give the person anything to eat or drink, or try to make him or her vomit.
- If the poison is through the skin, remove any clothing containing the poison and run water over the area.
- Call 999 for the ambulance and get the person to hospital as soon as possible.

Food poisoning

- Symptoms may occur a couple of hours after eating the toxic food or up to a day later.
- Encourage the person to rest and drink lots of water and sports drinks to replace body fluids and nutrients, and prevent dehydration (lack of fluids).
- If the person gets worse or doesn't recover after 24 hours, get medical advice.

More information about first aid can be found at the St. John Ambulance website: www.sja.org.uk