



## Allegheny County Department of Human Services Helpful Resources

### Ingestible Items - Child Safety

No matter how often you say “no,” infants and toddlers will put things in their mouths.

Tasting is one of the first ways a baby explores the world. Also, infants and toddlers are drawn to shiny and/or colorful items. If something is within reach (remember, toddlers love to climb) and noticed, the child will find it and taste it without thinking.

Some things are good for them. Many things are dangerous.

It is very important that caregivers pay attention to the “things” within the sight and reach of an infant, toddler or young child.

#### Drugs and Other Medications

All medicines and other drugs are hazardous substances when it comes to children. Approximately 60,000 young children end up in emergency rooms each year because they ate drugs or medicines while an adult wasn't looking. To prevent your child from being rushed to an emergency room, always keep all drugs – legal and illegal – and over-the-counter medication stored far out-of-sight and out-of-reach of toddlers and young children. When your child is old enough to understand, teach them what medicine is and why you or a trusted adult must be the one to give it to them.

Opioid overdoses are killing adults in record numbers. It takes far less to kill a child. Toddler deaths, due to eating a single painkiller pill or consuming a paper strip containing methadone, are also increasing dramatically. Carelessness with opioids is a deadly risk. Child-proof caps on prescription bottles are just a first line of safety. [Learn how to prevent an opioid death.](#)

Cold, flu and pain medications that contain codeine or tramadol and sold with a prescription or over-the-counter should be avoided when treating nursing mothers and children under 18 years of age. Shallow breathing resulting in death is possible.

Prescription and over-the-counter medication is often in pill or capsule form. The pharmaceutical industry's use of color to distinguish one medication from another also makes pills look like candy to a child. Even a single pill of many medications can do serious harm to a toddler or kill an infant.

NOTE: Not sure what the pills are that are in your medicine cabinet or pill box? Use the handy [Pill ID](#) to figure it out.

Vitamins, especially those containing iron, can be dangerous or deadly if too many are eaten.

Iron supplements are used safely by many. Too much iron can be dangerous or lethal.

“Chocolated” laxatives can look nearly identical to a chocolate candy bar. The result of eating a candy bar’s worth of laxatives is severe diarrhea often leading to severe dehydration.

## **Household Items**

Poisonous household items, including the common ones listed below, should always be locked out-of-sight and out-of-reach in child-proofed cabinets to eliminate the possibility that a child will find them.

Automotive fluids such as transmission fluid and brake fluid, anti-freeze and wiper fluid often have colors resembling soda and their bottles are often brightly colored. Brake fluid actually has a sweet taste as well. They are highly dangerous if swallowed even in very small amounts.

Batteries, if ingested, can cause serious health risks and death due to the electrical current they emit. Flat, circular “button” batteries are particularly attractive and dangerous to young children as they can get lodged in the esophagus where they readily burn the tender lining. Call 911 immediately when anyone swallows a battery\*. Batteries can also cause permanent damage if put into the nose or ears. Since batteries are in so many items, from hearing aids to greeting cards to remote controls, special care should be taken to keep these items out of the reach of children and to keep the battery compartments sealed with strong tape as an extra precaution. \*Immediately after calling 911, call the Battery Ingestion Hotline Call 202-625-3333 for guidance.

Caustic cleaners like toilet bowl cleaner, dishwasher powder, drain opener, rust remover and oven cleaner cause chemical burns from the lips through the entire digestive tract if swallowed. The damage is immediate and there is no way to stop it.

Cleaning fluids such as bathroom cleaners and window cleaner can cause serious harm to eyes and skin. Fluids in spray bottles are a leading cause of harm to children. Products that have a twist-able nozzle-guard offer an additional level of safety - if the guard is always turned to the “off” position after each use.

NOTE: Mixing two common household cleaners - ammonia and chlorine bleach - makes toxic chlorine gas. Do not use the same sponge or mop for both cleaners.

Hydrocarbon-based oils found in the home such as baby oil, mineral oil, gasoline, motor oil, lamp oil, kerosene and various beauty oils and heating oils create fumes that are easily inhaled if a child attempts to drink the fluid. The fumes can cause pneumonia and death.

Laundry detergent pods contain highly concentrated liquid detergent that is far more toxic than normal laundry detergent. What’s more, they look [so much like candy](#) that children readily put them in their mouths with dire consequences. It is better to purchase dry detergent or liquid detergent in a bottle if you have children living in or visiting your home.

## **Other Common Hazards**

Infants and children should not be trusted to avoid any hazardous substance or item. Their health and lives depend on caregivers being vigilant, cautious and trustworthy.

Alcoholic beverages and products that contain alcohol, like mouthwash, can cause coma and death when ingested by children. No glasses or bottles that contain beer, wine or hard liquor should be left within the reach of a child.

Nicotine in vaping liquid, cigarettes, chewing tobacco, cigars and nicotine gum or patches is highly toxic when ingested. The amount of nicotine in one cigarette butt is enough to poison a child.

### **How to Tell if a Poison Has Been Ingested**

- An empty container or remnant of a hazardous material is found where it should not be
- Burning, blistering or rash around the fingers, lips and/or tongue
- Unexplained vomiting
- Unexplained difficulty breathing
- Unexplained lethargy or unconsciousness

### **What to Do if Someone is Poisoned**

- Call 911 if the person is non-responsive, has trouble breathing, has a seizure or collapses
- If appropriate, call the Battery Ingestion Hotline Call 202-625-3333 for guidance after calling 911
- Other first aid for poisoning

### **Other Hints**

Never leave a purse or satchel within reach of a toddler. Curiosity can motivate young children to open pill boxes, make-up, hand sanitizer, nicotine products or other items that are hazardous if eaten.

Never reuse/relabel a container to hold anything besides what the container held when bought. Toddlers can recognize the shape and color of a container but cannot read a new label.

Never rely on your memory to follow-up with putting poisons away. Interruptions can keep your attention occupied long enough for an infant or toddler to find the available poison.

Never leave the lid loose on medicines or supplements, household products or automotive products. Always re-lock the child-proof cap on tamper resistant bottles. If the bottle has a locking cap that turns, twist it until you hear the click or cannot twist anymore. Your child's safety is worth the few extra seconds it takes to reopen the child-proof lid.

Never refer to medicine or vitamins as "candy." Too much candy may cause indigestion. Too much medicine or vitamins can cause serious illness or even death.

Use [Mr. Yuk™ stickers](#) on hazardous items and teach children what they mean.

To request a free sheet of Mr. Yuk™ stickers, please send a self-addressed stamped business-size envelope to:

Mr. Yuk™ Pittsburgh Poison Center  
200 Lothrop Street, PFG 01-01-01, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

## **Additional Resources**

[Pennsylvania's state take-back program](#)

1-800-662-4357

Find your nearest drop-off location for unused or expired Rx medication

[Pittsburgh Poison Center](#)

1-800-222-1222

Poison information and assistance

[Poison Control - National Capital Poison Center](#)

Find many details about hazardous substances. Provided much of the content for this webpage.

[Poison statistics by Poison.org](#)

See just how vulnerable children under six years of age are to accidental poisoning.

[Project D.U.M.P. Hotline](#)

412-459-5000

Arrange for pick-up of unused, outdated Rx medication