



BACKGROUND

Poison Prevention Week – March 19 to 25, 2023

Poison Prevention Week is an annual national awareness campaign to draw attention to the causes of poisoning and how to prevent them from occurring. With many potential poisons, such as medications, household cleaners and cannabis products in Canadian homes, it's important to know how to safely store these items and what to do in the event of a poisoning.

Parachute and Poison Prevention Week

This year, Parachute is joining forces with our partners across the country to show all Canadians they have the power to #RethinkPoisons and prevent unintentional poisoning at home.

The facts on unintentional poisoning

Unintentional poisoning is the third-leading cause of injury death in Canada. Each year, unintentional poisonings cost the healthcare system and Canadian society \$2.6 billion. These tragedies also have immeasurable costs to the individuals, families and communities affected.

In 2018, unintentional poisonings in Canada resulted in:

- 79,231 emergency department visits
- 10,722 hospitalizations, and
- 3,477 deaths

In 2020, Canada's poison centres managed 138,893 unintentional poison exposure cases.

Medications are the leading cause of poisoning in Canada. Prescription and over-the-counter medications can cause poisoning if taken by mistake or used incorrectly, depending on the dosage and the individual. In 2020, medications that relieve pain, known as analgesics, were the No. 1 substance Canada's poison centres received calls about that year.

Children are particularly vulnerable to poisoning because of their small body size and lower weight. They are also curious and like to mimic behaviour they see in adults.

Emerging poisoning concerns

You can make your home poison-safe by being aware of the products in your home that can be poisonous and ensuring they are stored safely. There are many everyday household products – such as medications, cleaners, vitamins, personal care products, car supplies, pesticides, and some plants – that can be poisonous to children and adults if ingested or used incorrectly.

In recent years, several new poison issues have emerged in recent years that everyone should be aware of. These include:

Cannabis

- Cannabis edibles often resemble common snacks (e.g., cookies, brownies, gummy candies). A young child may be unable to tell the difference and unknowingly consume a large amount.
- Cannabis edibles can have a stronger, more prolonged effect on the body than other forms of cannabis. Ingesting cannabis is the most common cause of cannabis poisoning in children.
- 94 per cent of Canadian parents who use cannabis agree it is their responsibility to safely store their cannabis products; yet, only 41 per cent strongly agree that they are aware of guidelines on how to store cannabis safely.
- Legal cannabis products in Canada must meet requirements about packaging and THC content. Parents and caregivers should be aware that unlicensed (illegal) products are often sold in unsafe packaging and might be stronger and more harmful to children.



E-Cigarettes

- Liquid nicotine refills for e-cigarettes are sold in flavours that may be appealing to children. Nicotine can be harmful to a child if they put it in their mouth, swallow it or spill it on their skin.
- Exposures related to e-cigarettes have been on the rise since 2012, with children younger than five years old accounting for 44 per cent. More than half of these cases have resulted from unintentional ingestion of e-cigarette liquid.



Hand sanitizers and bleach

- While these products are not new to Canadian homes, the COVID-19 pandemic increased focus on handwashing, cleaning and disinfecting.
- The number of calls to poison centres regarding hand sanitizers, bleaches and disinfectants was significantly higher in 2020 and 2021, compared to 2019.



Laundry detergent pods

- Colourful, transparent laundry detergent pods may look like candies or toys to children and cognitively impaired adults.
- Laundry detergent pods can be harmful if ingested, or if the liquid squirts into the eyes.
- Caregivers of older adults with dementia should also be aware of this issue as older adults have been harmed by ingesting laundry detergent pods.



How to prevent unintentional poisoning

- Take a moment to **identify potential poisons** in your home. Parachute's Poison Storage Checklists can help you take stock of various household products and everyday items (e.g. mouthwash and medications) that can be poisonous. The Checklists are available in two versions: One illustrating a house with a garage, and a second illustrating an apartment.
- Keep all potential poisons **locked up high, out of sight and out of reach** of children. Put medications and other products away immediately after every use.
- Keep products in their **original, child-resistant packaging**. Child-resistant packaging has been shown to reduce poisoning injuries and fatalities.
- Keep medications, cleaners and other products in their **original, labelled packaging** to ensure you have instructions for use, avoid mix-ups, and have information about the contents should you need to call a poison centre.
- **Avoid mixing different cleaning products** together. Mixing can cause chemical reactions that produce dangerous gases.
- **Avoid using cannabis products and e-cigarettes in front of children**. Studies suggest that child poisoning may be linked to imitative behaviour, as children often want to do the same things their parents and caregivers do.
- **Never refer to medications or vitamins as candy**.

Have a plan in case poisoning occurs

- Only 18 per cent of Canadians report knowing about local poison centre resources. Keep the poison centre phone number stored in your cellphone or in a visible location, such as on the fridge. You can look up the correct number for your province or territory at parachute.ca/poisoning.
- Have an action plan in place. Make sure all family members know what to do in the event of a poisoning. If you suspect a poisoning has occurred:
 - Contact your local poison centre immediately.
 - In case of loss of consciousness or difficulty breathing, call 911.

Visit parachute.ca/poisoning for a list of poison centres across Canada, and to learn more about how to #RethinkPoisons.

