HEALTH BASICS

Poison control center - emergency number

The Poison Help number connects people in the United States with urgent poisoning advice.

WHAT IT IS
A national phone line for urgent poisoning advice

WHERE IT COMES UP
Possible medication, chemical, gas, plant, or venom exposure

WHY IT MATTERS
Rapid advice can guide safe next steps

WHAT IT IS NOT
Not a disease, diagnosis, or replacement for 911

WHO TO ASK
A poison control center specialist

HOW IT IS CHECKED
Exposure history; tests only when medically needed

Overview

In the United States, the Poison Help number is 1-800-222-1222 . It connects you with a poison control center. The service is available at all times and provides expert advice about possible poisonings.

You can call when someone may have swallowed, inhaled, touched, or gotten a harmful substance in their eyes. Common examples include medicines, household cleaners, chemicals, fumes, plants, mushrooms, pesticides, and recreational drugs.

You do not need to be certain that poisoning has occurred. Calling early can help you decide whether the person can be watched at home, needs medical care, or requires emergency help.

Poison Help is not a disease, diagnosis, or medical test. It is an advice service. The number applies in the United States. Other countries have their own poison information services and emergency numbers.

Call 911 immediately if the person has collapsed, is having a seizure, has serious trouble breathing, or cannot be awakened. Do not delay emergency care to call Poison Help first.

How it works

When you call 1-800-222-1222, you are connected with a poison control center. Calls are handled by health professionals trained in toxicology, the study of the harmful effects of medicines, chemicals, and other substances.

The specialist asks what happened and estimates the risk. Useful details include:

Keep the package, bottle, label, pill, plant, or product nearby when possible. Do not guess if you do not know an answer. Uncertainty is common, and the specialist can still help.

The advice is specific to the exposure. You may be told to watch for particular changes at home, rinse the skin or eyes, move to fresh air, or seek medical care. The poison center may also follow up by phone.

There is no single test that determines whether someone needs Poison Help. If hospital assessment is needed, clinicians may use blood tests, an electrocardiogram-also called an ECG, which checks the heart's electrical activity-or other tests based on the substance involved.

An online tool called webPOISONCONTROL can assess some unintentional exposures when the person has no life-threatening signs. It is not suitable for every substance or situation. Calling is the safer choice when details are uncertain, the exposure was intentional, or the person's condition is changing.

- The substance or product name
- How the exposure happened
- The possible amount involved
- When it happened
- The person's age and approximate weight
- Any current health changes
- Existing medical conditions, pregnancy, or medicines taken

Why it matters for your health

The risk from an exposure is not always clear from the product name. A substance that is usually safe may be harmful in a larger amount, in a concentrated form, or when taken by a young child. Some extended-release medicines continue releasing their ingredients for many hours.

Poison control specialists can identify ingredients and compare the likely amount with known

toxic effects. This may prevent unnecessary emergency department visits when an exposure is low risk. It can also help people get timely care when the risk is greater.

A person may initially look or feel well after some serious exposures. Carbon monoxide, certain medicines, toxic alcohols, and some mushrooms can cause delayed harm. For that reason, do not wait for obvious changes before calling.

Poison Help can also reduce harm from incorrect first aid. Making someone vomit can cause choking or further injury. Household remedies may interfere with treatment. Activated charcoal should not be used at home unless a poison specialist or other qualified health professional specifically directs it.

What can go wrong

Possible exposures can lead to several different medical problems. These include poisoning , meaning harmful effects from a substance, and overdose , meaning more of a medicine or drug was taken than the body can safely handle.

Corrosive products, such as some drain or oven cleaners, can cause chemical burns. Fumes and gases can injure the lungs or reduce the oxygen reaching the body. Carbon monoxide poisoning can occur around faulty heaters, generators, engines, or fires.

A swallowed liquid may enter the lungs instead of the stomach. This is called aspiration. It can happen with products such as lamp oil, gasoline, or some furniture polishes, especially if vomiting occurs.

Errors can also happen when products look alike, medicines are stored in different containers, or more than one product contains the same active ingredient. An example is taking two cold or pain products that both contain the same medicine.

Some situations need emergency care rather than routine advice. Call 911 if the person:

An intentional overdose is both a medical and mental health emergency. Do not leave the person alone while waiting for emergency help if you can remain safely.

- Has collapsed or cannot be awakened
- Is having a seizure
- Has serious difficulty breathing
- Has a rapidly worsening condition
- Has intentionally taken a substance to cause self-harm

What you can do

Save 1-800-222-1222 in your phone and place it somewhere visible at home. You can call for advice even if no symptoms or other health changes are present.

Take immediate steps without putting yourself at risk. For an inhaled substance, move to fresh air if it is safe to do so. For material on the skin or in the eyes, begin rinsing with running water and call for instructions. Remove contaminated clothing when this can be done safely.

If something was swallowed, do not make the person vomit. Do not give food, drinks, activated charcoal, or a home remedy unless a poison specialist or emergency professional tells you to do so.

When calling, have the container or label available. Record the time of exposure, the estimated amount, and any instructions you receive. If you are told to go to an emergency department, bring the product container when safe.

After a low-risk exposure, no routine appointment may be needed if the poison specialist says home observation is enough. Follow the monitoring instructions and call back if the situation changes.

For repeated medication mix-ups, arrange a non-urgent review with a pharmacist or prescribing clinician. Ask whether a written medicine list, a simpler schedule, or different packaging could reduce confusion.

Common questions

Is Poison Help the same as 911?

No. Poison Help provides expert exposure advice. Call 911 for collapse, seizures, serious breathing trouble, inability to wake the person, or another immediate threat to life.

Does the person need to have symptoms before I call?

No. Some harmful effects are delayed. Call as soon as you suspect a potentially harmful exposure.

Can I call about taking the wrong medicine or an extra dose?

Yes. Have the medicine name, strength, possible amount, and time taken available. Do not take another dose until you have received appropriate advice.

Will Poison Help always send someone to the hospital?

No. The recommendation is based on the substance, amount, route of exposure, timing, and the person's health. Many situations can be managed at home, while others need prompt

medical assessment.

Can I call about a pet?

The Poison Help number is intended for human exposures. Contact a veterinarian or an animal poison control service for a pet. Fees may apply to animal poison services.

What if I am outside the United States?

Use the poison information center or emergency number for the country where you are located. The US number may not connect correctly from another country.

Sources

- Health Resources and Services Administration - Poison Help
- America's Poison Centers - Poison Help
- National Capital Poison Center - Need Immediate Assistance?
- National Capital Poison Center - First Aid for Poisonings
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - About Carbon Monoxide Poisoning