

## Accidental Poisoning

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If any child under 12 years of age in this state ingests or is contaminated with a hazardous substance, one of the poison-control centers is contacted. Then, the case is reported to the Illinois Department of Public Health.

During the last 11 year period, a yearly average of 11,567 children (12 years or under) either ate or were exposed to a hazardous substance. **Accidental ingestion** of medicines makes up the largest number of cases reported each year, with an average of over 60 per cent.

The ingestion of pesticides has accounted for an average of 6.5 per cent during the last eleven years, declining from 8 per cent in 1960 to 5.3 per cent in 1967. The number of pesticide cases reported each year has remained about the same, but the percentage has dropped. The reasons for this are (1) the population has increased each year, and (2) since 1960, more parents have developed an increased awareness of the hazards involved in the accidental ingestion of medicine. Parents have been more willing to take their children to their doctor or a poison-control center after an accidental ingestion than in previous years.

Accident cases fluctuate throughout the year, with more children eating pesticides and paint from the late spring to late fall than at other times.

Pesticides intended for the control of rodents, ants, moths, and roaches made up about 82.1 per cent of the accidental pesticide cases during the last eleven years. In more than half of the cases, the pesticide ingested by the child was a bait.

Anticoagulant rodenticides made up the largest group of accidental ingestions. The next most common ones were the arsenicals, followed by naphthalene and PDB.

Pesticide ingestions can be arranged into four groups: (1) those found by the child while the pesticide was in use as a bait; (2) mothballs; (3) those involving improper storage; and (4) those resulting from improper disposal. During 1967, there were 266 pesticide accident cases in downstate Illinois, resulting from the use of baits, 73 cases due to the improper use of mothballs; 57 because of improper storage, and 12 because of improper disposal.

The following precautions will help protect children from poisoning: The University of Illinois does not recommend the use of baits at all; however, if you insist on using them, use them properly and out of the reach of children. Store poisons properly in sealed containers if you use mothballs. Keep pesticides stored under lock and key. Burn empty paper pesticide bags, and stay out of the smoke. Burn out or wash out other pesticide containers. Then haul them to the sanitary land fill or bury them.

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In 1971, there was no recorded deaths due to the ingestion of pesticides or from contamination by them. Since 1960, there have been 24 deaths due to pesticides, 15 involving insecticides, five with rodenticides, and four due to herbicides. Only one death was the result of an agricultural accident. Of these 24 deaths, 10 were from baits, nine persons were affected by the pesticide while it was being used, and nine obtained it from storage.

Twenty-four deaths is a very small percentage of total number of accidental deaths, but the same causes listed for accidental ingestions were responsible for the deaths. These are again — (1) the use of baits; (2) careless use, storage, and disposal of mothballs; (3) improper storage, and (4) improper disposal.

Do yourself and your family a great favor this New Year of 1973, handle all hazardous substances carefully and use and store them only according to label directions.

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