



## South Texas Poison Center Newsletter

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# Poison Centers Offer Tips on a Safe Back-to-School Season

For all kids, returning to school is rife with possibility. But for preteens, teenagers and college students in particular, it can also be rife with potential dangers. By talking to your children about substances that can harm them, you can help them get the best experience out of their prime learning years.

The South Texas Poison Center and the American Association of Poison Control Centers offers the following tips on back-to-school dangers.

- Be wary of energy drinks. The same energy drinks that students take to cram during late-night study sessions or student athletes take to get through long days of sports practice pose more of a threat to their health than a benefit to their performance. Energy drinks contain large doses of caffeine. Some contain additional stimulants promoted to increase energy, enhance mood and delay sleep. The amount of caffeine in many energy drinks is much greater than the amount found in soda and is often much greater than the amount found in a cup of coffee, putting consumers at a far greater risk of caffeine overdose and related health problems. If improperly consumed, these products can cause symptoms that include nausea, vomiting, nervousness, tremor, insomnia, restlessness, delirium, sweating, headache, seizures, and increased heart rhythm. Many energy drinks are consumed by teens participating in sports activities because they are believed to boost performance and to replenish fluids. In fact, they are actually diuretics that increase dehydration. Do your child a favor and keep him or her away from energy drinks.

- It's easy to laugh off alcohol use among teens and college kids. Don't. What might seem like lighthearted teenage experimentation can contribute to academic failure, violence, injuries, sexual assaults and death. Alcohol poisoning is often fatal or could result in permanent brain damage. Signs include mental confusion, low body temperature, coma, irregular or decreased breathing, and pale or bluish skin. Excessive alcohol use can lead to vomiting and unconsciousness. Talk to your teen and college student about drinking and its consequences.
- For younger kids, the dangers of inhalants are real – and deadly. These substances, which can include solvents and gases that are abused to get a high, are increasingly common among children ages 10 to 12, and are a special concern because kids can die the first, tenth or hundredth time they sniff or huff. Tweens can experience toxic effects like a dazed appearance, slurred speech, nose bleeds and loss of muscle control. Look for unusually large collections of paint, spray cans, or room deodorizers and notice red eyes or chemical smells on the breath or clothing. Be wary of the dangers of "huffing," and don't tolerate experimentation.
- Prescribed and used correctly, prescription drugs have legitimate uses and positive results. But prescription pain medicine, also known as opioids, are commonly misused and abused among all age groups. Opioids can slow the body's systems down to the point where a person stops breathing. Other potential dangers include ADHD drugs like Adderall and Ritalin, which are abused as "brain boosters" or "academic enhancers." Misusing or abusing them could lead to an increased heart rate, restlessness, seizures and difficulty breathing.
- Teens are increasingly casual about their use of over-the-counter and prescription drugs, recreationally abusing them without regard for the potential health impacts of mixing these drugs. Many times alcohol is used as a chaser, complicating the effects of the drugs. While most adults think that this is insane, try to put on "kid lenses" and see how the daring and unknown would appeal to some risk-takers. Then have a frank discussion with your child about the dangers of experimenting with drugs.

The South Texas Poison Center and the American Association of Poison Control Centers supports the nation's 60 poison control centers in their efforts to prevent poisoning. Poison centers offer free and confidential services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you believe you've been exposed to a poison or have questions about whether a substance is poisonous, call your local poison center at 1-800-222-1222.

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# Trick-or-Treating Without Trouble

While Halloween is typically one of the highlights of a child's year, it can be less fun for parents, who fret about everything from buying or making the right costume to the safety of the goodies in the trick or treat bag.

With that in mind, the South Texas Poison Center and the American Association of Poison Control Centers offers a few tips aimed at making the spookiest time of the year a little less frightening for parents:

- Put trick-or-treaters in brightly colored costumes made of flame-resistant materials. Add some reflective tape on trick or treat bags to make sure your child is visible after it gets dark.
- If your child uses makeup rather than a mask, keep an eye out for possible skin irritation, including a rash or itching. If your child develops a rash, remove the makeup immediately and wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water.
- Carry a flashlight after the sun goes down, and make sure excited trick-or-treaters don't inadvertently wander in the way of passing cars.
- Stay in local and familiar neighborhoods. Send an adult with young children.
- Avoid barking dogs or other upset animals.
- Inspect all treats before the kids eat them. Eat only treats in original and unopened wrappers. If wrappers are faded, have holes, tears or signs of rewrapping, throw them away. Throw away all unwrapped candy or treats.
- Check fruits and homemade goodies for foreign objects that may have been inserted or injected, including pins, metal needles or razor blades. Cut fruit into several sections to check for foreign objects.
- Look out for Rover's well-being, too. Some treats, such as chocolate, can be poisonous for pets.
- Be wary of dry ice. While dry ice is a great special effect for a party, keep small pieces of it out of individual drink glasses. Dry ice can cause frostbite if it comes in contact with the skin or mouth.
- Keep candle-lit Jack-o-Lanterns off doorsteps and out of the way of foot traffic. Fire hazards could be a danger to trick-or-treaters dealing with long or cumbersome costumes.

For questions about poisons on Halloween and any other day of the year, call your local poison control center at 1 (800) 222-1222.

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# Happy—and safe—hunting

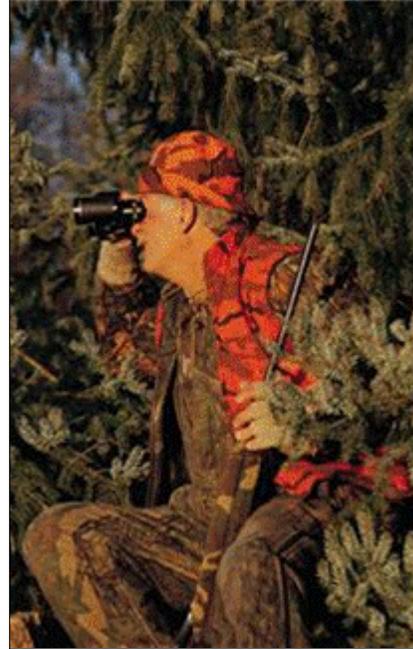
Hunting, while a rewarding hobby for many, is full of inherent dangers, and not just for the prey.

There's a reason so many hunters wear brightly colored safety gear when they head for the woods each fall, just as there's a reason why many states offer hunting safety classes every year.

But some of the greatest dangers hunters face during hunting season are not obvious to the naked eye.

With the start of hunting season in many states this month, the South Texas Poison Center and the American Association of Poison Control Centers offers a few tips on making hunting season less toxic:

- Gun bluing protects guns from rust and corrosion. But those same products can be fatal to a small child who might mistake this liquid for a soft drink. Gun bluing contains a variety of acids and other chemicals which can cause serious burns and damage to several of the body's organs. Store bluing and other rust and corrosion prevention chemicals in a locked cabinet or out of a child's reach.
- Keep children away from gun powder solvents and gun lubricants. Those products contain alcohols and petroleum, which are also dangerous if swallowed by a young child. Store gun powder solvents and gun lubricants in a locked cabinet or out of a child's reach.
- Be wary of animals that could prey on you. Snakes, spiders and ticks all pose a possibly fatal threat to hunters. Wear long sleeves and long pants to guard against bites, and keep an eye out for these sometimes tiny threats. Remember that in some parts of the country, snakes burrow, while in other parts of the country, snakes hibernate. If you're in an area where snakes burrow, be particularly aware of the possibility for stepping on one.
- After killing your game, field dress the meat as soon as possible. Cool meat as soon as you can to improve the meat's quality and decrease the chances of food poisoning. If you freeze your game, thaw and rinse it before cooking. Cook it thoroughly and never allow cooked game to sit for prolonged periods or without refrigeration.
- Don't forget the invisible killer, carbon monoxide, which is a major contributor to hunters' deaths each year. Hunters who camp and use heating devices in enclosed spaces or who go back to their vehicles to warm up and accidentally fall asleep with their motors running can become victims of carbon monoxide poisoning. Don't burn heaters in unventilated spaces, don't warm your hands and feet at the exhaust pipe of your vehicle and always remember that fresh air is the best treatment for carbon monoxide exposure.



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# Cadmium, Lead and Keeping Kids Safe

Six months ago the word “cadmium,” probably didn’t mean much to most people. These days, though, cadmium is quickly becoming a household name.



The heavy metal was recently responsible for two massive recalls, one involving Shrek drinking glasses sold at McDonald’s, the other Hannah Montana children’s jewelry. Both were made with a potentially dangerous amount of cadmium.

Cadmium is a metal used in the manufacturing of batteries, dyes, glasses, and ceramics. Products containing cadmium are not harmful to touch but can be harmful if they are put

in the mouth or swallowed, which can result in a poisoning. Since children are often putting things in their mouths, they are considered an at-risk age group.

Cadmium is one of two main culprits responsible for huge recalls of toys and children’s products. Lead, a more commonly known threat, can be poisonous if absorbed in the body through breathing or swallowing. Lead poisoning can happen gradually or through large exposures.

The South Texas Poison Center and the American Association of Poison Control Centers offers the following tips aimed at preventing lead and cadmium poisoning.

- Read product ingredient labels before purchasing an item, especially if it’s intended for children. Avoid products that do not have ingredient lists available.
- Keep small items out of children’s reach. These items can be choking hazards but also can contain toxins such as lead or cadmium.
- Make sure children wash hands thoroughly after playing and before eating.
- Notice that the symptoms of short-term exposure to cadmium can include stomach irritation, vomiting, and diarrhea. Long-term exposure or an extremely large exposure can cause kidney damage. Chronic exposure can also cause fragile bones and is linked to some cancers.
- Be aware: Currently, there are no federal laws regulating manufacturers’ use of cadmium in children’s jewelry. In some cases, companies use cadmium as a substitute for lead since the United States bans the use of lead in manufacturing children’s products or toys.
- Take an inventory of possible lead sources in the home even though regulations are tighter. These sources may include lead paint used in older homes (before 1978), drinking water from lead pipe plumbing, toys made outside of the country, contaminated herbal supplements, and small weights (like fishing lures).

- Be particularly aware of the dangers of lead poisoning in small children: Unborn babies, infants, and toddlers are most vulnerable to the effects of chronic lead exposure.
- Watch for signs of lead poisoning in children, which include loss of appetite, tiredness, abdominal pain, and vomiting. Long term-exposure to lead can include irritability, fatigue, behavioral change, and developmental delays.

If you are concerned that your child might have come into contact with a product containing cadmium or lead, call your local poison center at 1-800-222-1222 or your child's doctor.



American Association of  
Poison Control Centers

This newsletter is brought to you by the **SOUTH TEXAS POISON CENTER** and was produced with assistance from the American Association of Poison Control Centers and local poison centers across the country.

When you dial 1-800-222-1222, your call is answered by a medical professional with special training in poison management.

Help is fast, free, confidential and available 24 hours a day, every day.