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Dear Instructor:

This guide was developed to assist group leaders in educating adults about poison prevention. In 2005, over 75,000 residents of eastern Pennsylvania and the State of Delaware called The Poison Control Center. Over 60% of those calls involved young children. Many of those incidents could have been avoided if adults followed a few simple safety precautions.

The material in this guide includes information about basic poison facts, poison prevention and activities in which the adults may participate. The manual is broken down into two categories: adult and senior citizen presentations.

With your help, we can greatly decrease the incidence of accidental poisonings. If you need additional information or if you have any questions in planning the presentation, please feel free to contact me at (215) 590-4848.

Sincerely,

Peg Stancavage, RN, CSPI
Community Health Educator
What is The Poison Control Center?

The mission of The Poison Control Center is to reduce the number of accidental poisonings, the severity of injuries, the number of deaths and the health care costs associated with poison exposures.

The Poison Control Center (PCC) was established in 1985 as an independent non-profit organization. In 1993, the Center became a division of The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. The PCC’s 24-hour emergency hotline service offers assistance during a poisoning emergency. This service is available to the public and health care providers in the Pennsylvania counties of Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, Philadelphia, Carbon, Lehigh, Monroe, Northampton, Pike and Wayne and the three counties of the State of Delaware. The Center operates under the strict national standards of the American Association of Poison Control Centers and has been certified as a regional poison control center since 1986. The PCC is one of 53 certified poison control centers in the United States and one of only three certified centers in the State of Pennsylvania. (The other certified centers are located in Pittsburgh and Hershey).

When you call the PCC, the phone is answered by a Specialist in Poison Information (SPI) -- a registered nurse, pharmacist, or physician who has additional training in toxicology. The SPI makes an assessment of the seriousness of the poisoning exposure based on the specific substance, the time of exposure, the patient’s clinical status and the potential for early intervention. This information is needed in order for the Specialist to properly assess the seriousness of the exposure and to provide the appropriate treatment recommendations. We ask for your name and phone number so that we can follow up for each poisoning exposure that has resulted in symptoms or when there is likelihood that the patient will become symptomatic. The SPIs use a state-of-the-art information retrieval system (Poisindex®) that lists over 600,000 household products, chemicals, and medications along with other references to obtain information that is needed in handling a poisoning exposure.

The Poison Control Center responds to an average of 150 calls a day. The majority of the calls originate in the home and are usually made by the parent or relative of a small child. The workplace is the second most common site of a poisoning exposure.

What is a Poison?

A poison is a substance -- solid, liquid, or gas -- that may injure or impair health, or even cause death when taken into the body or put onto the skin surface. Poisons come in all kinds of different colors and shapes. Some poisons are odorless and tasteless. Sometimes things that smell and/or taste good may be poisonous. In most homes, poisons can be found in almost every room.
**Potential Poisons in the Home:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bathroom:</th>
<th>Kitchen:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>air freshener</td>
<td>ammonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antiseptics</td>
<td>detergent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aspirin</td>
<td>floor wax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>toilet bowl cleaner</td>
<td>medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tile cleaner</td>
<td>alcoholic beverages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deodorant</td>
<td>bleach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hair dye/perm</td>
<td>drain cleaner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medicine</td>
<td>vitamins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mouthwash</td>
<td>cleaners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rubbing alcohol</td>
<td>glue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baby powder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shampoo</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bedroom:</th>
<th>Garage/Basement:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nail polish</td>
<td>antifreeze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cologne</td>
<td>charcoal lighter fluid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medicine</td>
<td>gasoline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perfumes</td>
<td>paint thinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after-shave</td>
<td>pesticides/rodenticides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cosmetics</td>
<td>windshield washer fluid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kerosene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fertilizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>turpentine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>motor oil</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Room:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cigarettes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mothballs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flowers/plants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>furniture polish</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Most children and many adults think of poisons as very deadly substances that are mysterious, quick acting, and impossible to trace. They rarely consider cologne, perfume, shampoo, plants, vitamins with iron, and many other common household products as poisons. Almost any substance can become a poison when used inappropriately or in excessive amounts.

Many people tend to think anything sold “over the counter” must be safe. Many others assume that if a product is not labeled “poison” it must be harmless to use. Most product labels contain adequate information concerning use, storage, and potential hazards. However, many people do not carefully read the label and some do not read them at all. Words like **caution, warning, danger, flammable, corrosive, hazardous, fatal, caustic, harmful, and poison** are signal words that alert the user to the potential hazards associated with the product.
Plants are a common cause of poisoning in children under the age of six. Houseplants, yard shrubs, wild berries, trees and mushrooms are all attractive to children. Children should be taught not to put twigs, berries, mushrooms, etc. in their mouths.

The following are a few popular plants that can be toxic if eaten: azaleas, buttercups, daffodil, dieffenbachia, English ivy, foxglove, holly berries, hyacinth, hydrangea, morning glory, wild mushrooms, poison ivy, rhododendron and tulips.

The following are a few popular plants that are generally non-toxic: African violet, begonia, Christmas cactus, dahlia, daisies, dandelion, gardenia, jade plant, lily (day, Easter, or tiger), magnolia, marigold, petunia, rose and spider plant.

A more complete list of toxic and non-toxic plants is available through the Poison Control Center.

**What to Do in a Poisoning Emergency**

- First of all, **REMAIN CALM**

- Do not give anything by mouth, including syrup of ipecac, until you have spoken to The Poison Control Center or a physician.

- In the event of an accidental poisoning, **CALL THE POISON CONTROL CENTER at 1-800-222-1222**. The Specialist in Poison Information will instruct you on how to handle the exposure.

- When you call The Poison Control Center, have the following information available:
  - Your name and phone number
  - Age of the poisoning victim
  - Name of the product involved in the poisoning
  - Amount involved
  - Time the poisoning occurred
  - Any symptoms the poisoning victim is experiencing

- Follow the instructions given to you by The Poison Control Center

- **DO NOT** rely on antidotes or home remedies listed on first-aid charts or product labels. They may be out-of-date and may cause more damage than the poison you are trying to treat.
Tips for Poison Prevention

Awareness is the key to preventing accidental poisonings. The first step in preventing accidental poisonings is the recognition that almost any item has the potential to poison when used inappropriately.

Accidental poisonings are preventable, but only when people are aware of the problem and practice poison prevention measures. By following these basic rules, and poison proofing your home, accidental poisonings can be prevented:

- Clean out medicine cabinets and discard all outdated medications by taking them to your nearest pharmacy. Do not discard medicine in the trash.

- Always read the product label before using the product.

- Keep household products in their original container. Keep labels intact and readable. Never keep household products in cans, cups, or soda/juice bottles.

- Store products out of the reach of children and pets.

- When called to the phone or door while using hazardous products, make sure children in your care are not left unattended. If necessary, take the child or the product with you. Never leave a child unattended in the presence of hazardous materials/products.

- Read and follow all label instructions for the proper use of each product.

- Purchase medications and household products in child-resistant containers when possible.

- Never take medicines in the dark. Always read the label before taking medication. Never take medicine that has not been prescribed for you.

- Never refer to medicine as candy.

- Label all indoor and outdoor plants with both their botanical and common names.

- Teach children to seek permission from a parent or caregiver before they eat or drink anything. Keep one (1) bottle of syrup of ipecac per child in the home.
How do Accidental Poisonings Happen?

**Improper storage** of products is a frequent cause of accidental poisoning. Many poisons are improperly stored where children can easily reach them, such as underneath the sink or on top of the table. It is very dangerous to store products such as gasoline, furniture polish, or cleansers in food containers.

**Improper use** or combining products is another cause of accidental poisoning. The combination of bleach and ammonia creates a poisonous gas (chloramine gas) that can cause respiratory problems. The use of varnishes or paint strippers in poorly ventilated areas can cause headaches, nausea, vomiting, and other serious conditions. Taking medicine without reading the label, increasing the dosage, or taking a friend’s medication can have very serious consequences. When taking medication, it is important to read the label in a well-lighted area. Many people have been poisoned when they have ingested or administered medication in the dark and later discovered that it was not the proper medication. It is important to check the position of the opening before spraying aerosols in order to avoid eye or skin injury. Many aerosols can cause damage to the delicate tissues of the eye. Remember - anything in an aerosol bottle should be considered a potential poison. Many accidental poisonings happen as a result of children imitating their parents or caregivers. Children are great imitators; they want to gargle with mouthwash or put gasoline in the lawn mower, but they don’t understand that gasoline and even large amounts of mouthwash can hurt them.

When Do Poisonings Occur?

Poison accidents can happen to anyone at any time. Most poisonings occur when household products are in use. A common call to The Poison Control Center involves a caregiver who left a child unattended “for a moment” within reach of a hazardous drug or product. Remember - it only takes a minute for a child to get into a poisonous substance. Accidental poisonings also occur in times of stress, such as during a household move, illness or death in the family, or during the holidays. Accidental poisonings also occur before meals when youngsters are hungry and parents or caregivers are preoccupied.
Adult Poison Safety Presentation

Appropriate for babysitter groups, high school-age parents, expecting/new parents, foster parents, day care providers and grandparents

(Approximate time: 30 minutes)

Materials needed to conduct the presentation:

- Copies of Poison Prevention Quiz
- One-ounce bottle of Syrup of Ipecac
- Sample cabinet locks
- Phone stickers*, Mr. Yuk stickers*, brochures* and Poison Pen Notes* for each member of the group.
*These materials may be obtained from The Poison Control Center.

A. Pre-presentation Quiz (10 minutes)

1. Distribute the Poison Prevention Quiz. (See attachment.)

2. Allow approximately 10 minutes for the group to complete the quiz.

3. Do not collect the quizzes; review the correct answers at the end of the presentation.

B. Introduction to the Poison Control Center (5 minutes)

1. The Poison Control Center receives nearly 60,000 calls a year. Approximately 61% of the calls involve children under the age of six.

2. The Poison Control Center is available free of charge to any person who has been exposed to poison or needs information or poison treatment advice.

3. The top 10 substances most frequently involved in poison exposures to children (under the age of six):

   1) cosmetic and personal care products
   2) cleaning substances
   3) analgesics (acetaminophen, aspirin, etc)
   4) plants
   5) cough and cold preparations
   6) foreign bodies (toys, batteries, etc)
   7) topicals (creams)
   8) pesticides (including rodenticides)
   9) antibiotics
   10) vitamins
C. Tips for poison-proofing the home (5 minutes)

The best way to prevent accidental poisonings is to poison-proof the home. Always have the POISON CONTROL CENTER's number 1-800-222-1222 near the phone and call before attempting to treat a poisoned victim.

1. Put all poisonous objects high up on the shelf or keep them locked away in the cabinets. (Show the cabinet locks and demonstrate how they work.)

2. Throw away anything that is poisonous and is no longer needed.

3. **ALWAYS** keep on hand one bottle of syrup of ipecac for each child in the home. **DO NOT USE UNLESS INSTRUCTED TO DO SO BY A PHYSICIAN OR THE POISON CONTROL CENTER.** Syrup of ipecac causes vomiting, and is sometimes used to clear the stomach of a poisonous substance. Syrup of ipecac can be purchased in any pharmacy for about $2.00 per bottle, and you do not need a prescription from a doctor. (Show the sample bottle and pass it around the group.)

4. **AGAIN,** **DO NOT GIVE A CHILD SYRUP OF IPECAC OR INDUCE VOMITING UNTIL YOU CALL A PHYSICIAN OR THE POISON CONTROL CENTER.** In some situations, vomiting greatly increases the danger of the poison. This is true with hydrocarbons, such as furniture polish, gasoline, kerosene, paint thinners, etc.

The word **hydrocarbon** refers to the chemical structure of oils refined from petroleum. They may also appear on the product label as “petroleum distillates.” The main reason for concern when a hydrocarbon is swallowed is that the child will choke on it and breathe it into the lungs. This is called **aspiration.** Hydrocarbons have a higher chance than other substances of being aspirated because they are oily and very slippery. Once a hydrocarbon enters the lungs it spreads very quickly, coating the air passages and irritating the tissues. In the lungs, this spreading behavior is very dangerous, causing a persistent, annoying cough, shortness of breath, grunting or wheezing. There may also be chills and fever. A complication from aspirating hydrocarbons is **chemical pneumonia.** When chemical pneumonia is not treated, it can be life threatening. This is why the labels on hydrocarbon-containing products warn of a potential fatality. Hydrocarbons are LESS harmful to the digestive tract.

5. Remember, safety caps on medications are “child-resistant,” NOT childproof! A child can get the cap off eventually. Child-resistant safety caps give you a little extra time as a safety buffer. These caps are not a substitute for a lock and key.

6. Also, some poisoning instructions printed on the back of bottles are no longer recommended. For example, using salt or salt water, sticking a finger down the throat or drinking egg whites and milk are all outdated recommendations and can actually be harmful.
7. Put the Mr. Yuk stickers on the poisonous items in the house and teach the children that Mr. Yuk means “NO!” and that they should not touch or go near any items that are poisonous. (Show the stickers and pass them around the group.)

D. What to do if a poisoning occurs (5 minutes)

1. Remain calm

2. Call The Poison Control Center. Be ready to give the following information:
   
   • Your name and telephone number
   • Name of substance involved in poisoning and ingredients
   • Age and weight of patient
   • Amount of substance involved
   • Time poisoning occurred
   • Any symptoms

3. The Poison Control Center will give you instructions on what to do next.

Note: The Poison Control Center is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, free of charge and all calls are confidential.

E. Conclusion (5 minutes)

1. Go over the answers to the Poison Prevention Quiz together. (See attached answers.)

2. Distribute the material (phone stickers, Mr. Yuk stickers, brochures and Poison Pen Notes).
Materials needed for the presentation:

- One-ounce bottle of Syrup of Ipecac
- Sample cabinet locks
- Sample medication reminder (diary or calendar)
- Phone stickers,* Mr. Yuk stickers*, brochures*, and Poison Pen Notes *for each member of the group.

*These materials may be obtained from The Poison Control Center.

A. Introduction to the Poison Control Center (5 minutes)

1. The Poison Control Center is a division of The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and it serves the residents and healthcare providers of the Delaware Valley, Lehigh Valley and the State of Delaware.

2. The mission of the Poison Control Center is to reduce the number of accidents, severity of injuries, number of deaths and the healthcare costs associated with poison exposures.

3. The Poison Control Center receives nearly 60,000 calls a year, averaging approximately 160 calls a day.

4. The Poison Control Center is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, free of charge and all calls are confidential.

B. General safety tips for all senior citizens (10 minutes)

1. Notify your healthcare providers about all medications being taken, including those prescribed by other practitioners, over-the-counter products, and herbal or natural remedies. Different medicines may interact with each other and impact on your health.

2. Also, be knowledgeable about your medication. Asking your healthcare provider questions about proper dosing, side effects, drug interactions, and food and alcohol restrictions may prevent therapeutic errors and adverse side effects.

3. Report any side effects from the medications to your healthcare provider as soon as possible. Do not stop taking your medication or change the dose without first consulting a physician.
4. If you skip a dose, do not take an extra dose without first discussing it with a physician. Also, pharmacists can be good sources of information about medication. Use the same pharmacy consistently so that your pharmacist can get to know your medical history before answering any medication-related questions. Large print labels and child-resistant caps can reduce the risk of accidental poisoning and are available in pharmacies by request.

5. Use a medication diary or calendar to keep track of dosing schedules. Hang the calendar in the area where the medication is taken and mark it every time a dose is taken. Accurate records will remind you of your last dose and make it easier for your health care provider to evaluate your medication therapy. (Show sample medication reminders and pass them around the group)

6. Take medicine, gargle and brush teeth in adequate light. Using tubes and bottles in the dark may lead to mix-ups. Wear your glasses when taking medicine and using household products.


8. Never share medicines. Just because a medication worked well for one person does not mean it will work well for another.

C. General safety tips for grandparents (10 minutes)

The best way to prevent accidental poisonings for your grandchildren is to poison-proof your home before they come over to visit! Always have The Poison Control Center’s number 1-800-222-1222 near the phone and call before attempting to treat a poisoned victim.

1. Put all poisonous objects high up on the shelf or keep them locked away in the cabinets. (Show sample locks and demonstrate how they work)

2. Throw away potential poisons that are no longer being used.

3. ALWAYS keep on hand one bottle of syrup of ipecac on hand for each child in the home. DO NOT USE UNLESS INSTRUCTED TO DO SO BY A PHYSICIAN OR THE POISON CONTROL CENTER. Syrup of ipecac causes vomiting, and is sometimes used to clear the stomach of a poisonous substance. Syrup of ipecac can be purchased in any pharmacy for about $2.00 per bottle, and you do not need a prescription from a doctor. (Show the sample bottle and pass it around the group.)

4. AGAIN, DO NOT GIVE A CHILD SYRUP OF IPECAC OR INDUCE VOMITING UNTIL YOU CALL A PHYSICIAN OR THE POISON CONTROL CENTER. In some situations, vomiting greatly increases the danger of the poison. This is true with hydrocarbons, such as furniture polish, gasoline, kerosene, paint thinners, etc.
The word **hydrocarbon** refers to the chemical structure of oils refined from petroleum. They may also appear on the product label as “petroleum distillates.” The main reason for concern when a hydrocarbon is swallowed is that the patient will choke on it and breathe it into the lungs. This is called **aspiration**. Hydrocarbons have a higher chance than other substances of being aspirated because they are oily and very slippery. Once a hydrocarbon enters the lungs, it spreads very quickly, coating the air passages and irritating the tissues. In the lungs this spreading behavior is very dangerous, causing a persistent, annoying cough, shortness of breath, grunting or wheezing. There may also be chills and fever. A complication from aspirating hydrocarbons is **chemical pneumonia**. When chemical pneumonia is not treated, it can be life threatening. This is why the labels on hydrocarbon-containing products warn of a potential fatality. Hydrocarbons are LESS harmful to the digestive tract.

5. Remember, safety caps on medications are “child-resistant,” NOT childproof! A child can get the cap off eventually. Child-resistant safety caps give you a little extra time as a safety buffer. These caps are not a substitute for a lock and key.

6. Also, some poisoning instructions printed on the back of bottles are no longer recommended. For example, using salt or salt water, sticking a finger down your throat or drinking egg whites and milk are all outdated recommendations and can actually be harmful.

7. Put the Mr. Yuk stickers on the poisonous items in the house and teach the children that Mr. Yuk means “NO!” and that they should not touch or go near any items that are poisonous. (Show the stickers to the group and pass them around)

**D. What to do if a poisoning occurs** (5 minutes)

1. Remain calm

2. Call The Poison Control Center. Be ready to give the following information:

   - Your name and telephone number
   - Name of substance involved in poisoning and ingredients
   - Age and weight of patient
   - Amount of substance involved
   - Time poisoning occurred
   - Any symptoms

3. The Poison Control Center will give you instructions on what to do next

4. **Remember**, The Poison Control Center is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, free of charge and all calls are confidential.

**E. Conclusion**

Distribute the material (phone stickers, Mr. Yuk stickers, brochures, and *Poison Pen Notes*).
POISON PREVENTION QUIZ

1. The Poison Control Center provides service in assisting poisoning emergencies:
   a. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year
   b. Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM

2. In what age group do most poisonings occur?
   a. Children ages 0-6
   b. School-age children ages 7-12
   c. Teenagers ages 13-19

3. If someone accidentally swallows a poison, the first thing you should do is:
   a. Make the person vomit
   b. Take the person to the hospital
   c. Call The Poison Control Center

4. Which of the substances listed below would you use to induce vomiting if a poisoning occurred in your home?
   a. Gagging with your finger
   b. Syrup of Ipecac
   c. Salt water

5. Plants are a common cause of poisoning in children under six.
   a. True
   b. False

6. The use of child-resistant packaging always prevents accidental poisoning.
   a. True
   b. False

7. You need a prescription from the doctor to purchase a bottle of Syrup of Ipecac.
   a. True
   b. False

8. When giving medicine to children, it’s a good idea to refer to it as “candy.”
   a. True
   b. False
ANSWER KEY TO THE POISON PREVENTION QUIZ

1. a
2. a
3. c
4. b
5. a
6. b
7. b
8. b