



Pesticides and Child Safety

FACT SHEET 18-034-0216

Just the Facts...

A pesticide is any substance used to prevent, destroy, or repel pests such as insects, rodents, other animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms like bacteria and viruses. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), pesticides are used in about three out of every four homes in the United States. Pesticides commonly used and stored in and around your home and garden may put children at risk, even when handled in a seemingly safe manner.

Why should I be concerned about pesticides and child safety?

Many families are unaware of the serious health risks associated with the improper storage or use of household pesticides. The American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) states that 50 percent of the more-than two million poisoning incidents that occur annually involve children younger than six years of age and nearly 90 percent of these incidents occur inside the home. Because children are particularly susceptible to even the smallest amount of pesticides and typically spend more time near treated surfaces, families should be informed on how best to protect children from exposure and prevent accidental poisoning.

Where are children most likely to encounter pesticides in and around the home?

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), pesticides are most commonly found in bathrooms and kitchens. Pesticides are also commonly stored in garages and garden sheds. Close to half of households with children under the age of five store at least one pesticide product within reach of a child (less than four feet off the ground).

How can I select the safest pesticide products to use around children?

When pesticides are necessary, select EPA-registered products using the signal word on the label to identify the least toxic product. Signal words are always found printed in all-caps on the front panel of product labels and they describe the toxicity of the product. The signal word can be DANGER (high toxicity), WARNING (moderate toxicity), or CAUTION (low toxicity). Pesticides labeled "CAUTION" are recommended since they are the least toxic.

What does EPA registration mean?

Most pesticides contain chemicals that can be harmful to people, animals, or the environment. For this reason, the EPA regulates pesticides in the United States to protect public health and the environment. An EPA registration number ("EPA Reg. No.") on a product indicates that it has been evaluated by the EPA and is approved for effectiveness against labeled pests and safety to humans when applied according to the directions for use on the product label. Look for an EPA registration number at the bottom of the front or back side of the label.



Safety badge from the CDC raising awareness about pesticides and child safety. Image: CDC

What can I do to minimize pesticide risk to children on my property?

Pests can often be managed around the home without relying solely on pesticides. Pesticides should be used as a last resort and should always be used and stored properly. Always read the pesticide label first and follow all the directions for use, including all precautions and restrictions. Keep pesticides in their original containers. Never transfer pesticides to containers that children may associate with food or drink. Remove children, pets, and toys before applying pesticides (inside or outside). Use spot and crack/crevice treatments rather than area-wide applications. Never place rodent or insect baits where small children can get to them. Use child-resistant packaging correctly by tightly sealing the container after every use. Teach children that "pesticides are poisons", and should not be touched. All pesticides should bear the statement "KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN". Keep the product away

from children while in use, and store the pesticide where children cannot get to it. Store pesticides and pesticide equipment in a locked cabinet or room. A cool, dry, well-ventilated area is best. Install child-proof latches on cabinets, particularly on those in the kitchen and bathroom. Place warning stickers on all pesticide containers. Post the AAPCC national hotline phone number 1-800-222-1222 near every telephone in your home. Share safety badges designed by the CDC on social media to increase awareness about pesticide safety to friends and family members. Alert all caregivers about the potential dangers of pesticides and share these tips with them.

Why are children more susceptible to pesticide poisoning than adults?

Children are more susceptible to pesticide poisoning because of key differences in their bodies and behavior. Children's nervous, immune, digestive and other systems are still developing and are less able to detoxify and excrete pollutants than fully-developed adult systems. Children also tend to crawl and play in spaces that might contain pesticides and have frequent hand-to-mouth contact. These differences put children at higher risk for pesticide exposure and potential poisoning when compared to adults.

What symptoms indicate my child has been poisoned by pesticides?

Contact with pesticides may cause serious harm to a child's health. Acute signs of exposure to pesticides may include headaches, dizziness, muscle twitching, weakness, tingling sensations or nausea.

What should I do if I think my child has been poisoned by pesticides?

If you think your child may have been poisoned by pesticides, immediately try to determine what pesticide the child was exposed to and where the pesticide touched them. Refer to the pesticide product label and Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for any specific emergency first-aid measures. Call 911 if the child is unconscious, having trouble breathing, or having convulsions. If you take your child to an emergency room, take the pesticide container or SDS along with you so that the physician can read the pesticide's ingredients and be able to give better treatment. If first-aid instructions are not available, call the AAPCC national hotline phone number 1-800-222-1222 for help with first-aid procedures or follow these general guidelines:

Swallowed pesticide. Call a poison control center or doctor immediately. Do not induce vomiting unless told to do so by a poison control center or doctor. Be aware that some pesticides can cause more harm if the child is made to vomit.

Pesticide in the eye. Eye membranes absorb pesticides faster than any other external parts of the body; some pesticides can rapidly cause irreversible eye damage. If a pesticide splashes into an eye, hold the eyelid open, remove contact lenses if present, and wash quickly and gently with clean, running water from the tap or a hose for at least 15-20 minutes. Do not use eye drops, chemicals, or drugs in the wash water. Contact a poison control center or doctor for additional treatment advice.

Pesticide on the skin. If a pesticide splashes onto a child's skin, drench the area with water and remove contaminated clothing. Wash the skin and hair thoroughly with soap and water. Discard all contaminated clothing. Contact a poison control center or doctor for additional treatment advice.

Inhaled pesticide. If a child has inhaled any pesticides, carry or drag the child to fresh air immediately. If you think you need respiratory protection and it is not available to you, call the Fire Department and wait for emergency equipment before entering the area. Once the child is away from the contamination source, loosen the child's tight clothing. If the child's skin is blue or the child has stopped breathing, give artificial respiration (if you know how) and call 911 for help.

Where can I find more information about pesticides and child safety?

American Association of Poison Control Centers: <http://www.aapcc.org/>

National Pesticide Information Center: <http://npic.orst.edu/health/child.html>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/Poisoning/preventiontips.htm>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: <http://www2.epa.gov/saferchoice>



Call the AAPCC national hotline if you need help with a pesticide poisoning emergency. This will connect you to your local poison control center for immediate assistance. Image: AAPCC.