

fact sheet

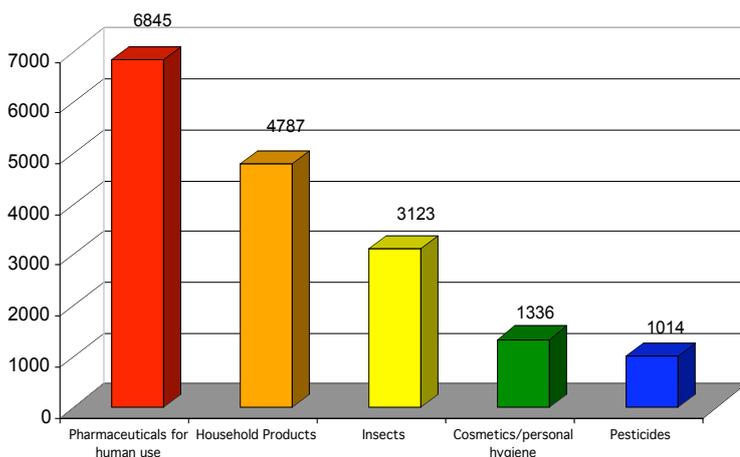
The Facts**

Each year in Queensland almost 850 children aged 4 and under present at Queensland hospitals as a result of poisoning. Most accidental poisonings occur to children less than five years of age, with children aged one to three most at risk. In addition, 203 children aged between 5 and 15 present at Queensland hospitals annually as well.

The most common product involved in poisoning cases is paracetamol (a common painkiller found in almost every household). 56% of all childhood poisonings involved medicines / drugs.*

- Almost 94% of child poisoning cases (0 – 4 years) presenting at Queensland hospitals were triaged as “urgent”, “emergency” or “resuscitate” indicating the seriousness of the case.
- Over 90% of poisonings occurred in a home.
- Approximately 88% of these were for children aged 1 to 3 years of age.
- The Poisons Information Centre in Queensland received over 27000 calls for advice in 2005 alone. Over 11000 of these calls related to children under 5 years.

Chart 2: Top Five Agent type/use by child* victim
(Poisons Information Centre, 2002)



Why Children Are at Risk?

Between 1 to 3 years of age children begin to get skills that make them more mobile. This means potentially toxic products are more easily reached.

Young children are exploring their world and will put anything they can get into their hands into their mouths.

At this age they are curious, but lack judgement and are unable to read. They also like to imitate what others do, including taking medications.

Amelia's story

Mum had just gone outside to hang out washing when two and a half-year-old Amelia woke unexpectedly from her nap. She wandered into the kitchen looking for food but found some brightly coloured “lollies” on the bench. They were actually her father’s hay fever tablets and she helped herself to two.

By the time her mum found Amelia, she was drowsy and unsteady on her feet. Her eyes began to roll backwards and she started having spasms. She was admitted to hospital overnight but her parents took far longer to recover from the shock.

Packaging



Blister packaging of tablets and child resistant closures have lead to a substantial reduction in incidents of poisonings. Children can swallow large quantities of medications if they are left opened or loose.

When does poisoning occur?

Child poisoning can occur at anytime! But especially when your normal routine changes. For example medicine may be more accessible when someone is sick or when visiting grandparents who take medicines regularly. Extra care is also required when on holidays, moving house, having visitors and during family problems.





What can I do to Prevent Poisoning?

Check every room in your home for poisonous products – “it only takes a few minutes to check if you are inviting trouble”:

- Store poisons in a locked cupboard preferably 1.5 metres above the ground (out of sight, out of reach – locked up and away).
- Store medicines separately from chemicals and cleaners but ensure both are locked away.
- Use child resistant locks on cupboards or cabinets that store medicines and poisons. You can buy these at many hardware stores, or call Kidsafe QLD for more information.
- Don't store poisons near foods. Some children's medicines need to be kept in the refrigerator – use a small portable lockable container (e.g. a computer disk box) to enable these medicines to be stored safely.
- Return all poisons to their safe storage area **immediately** after you use or buy them. If you are using household products when the doorbell or phone rings take the product with you.
- Ask for and use products in child resistant containers and make sure the lids are on properly after use. However remember child resistant is **not** child proof – many two year olds can open them.
- Store all medicines, cleaners and chemicals in their **original** containers that are clearly labelled.
- Dispose of unwanted and out of date medicines. Contact your local pharmacy for advice.
- **Never** refer to medicines or vitamins as “lollies”.
- Before giving medicines always read the label.
- Keep your guests handbag out of reach of your child.
- Check that the plants in your garden are not poisonous. Ask your local nursery or refer to the Poisonous Plants fact sheet.
- Consider chemical free cleaning (cleaning gloves)



Examples of child resistant catches sold at Kidsafe

What can be poisonous to children?

- All medications; over-the-counter and prescription (eg. Paracetamol, sedatives, heart pills, iron tablets and contraceptive pills)
- Drain cleaners and oven cleaners
- Cleaning products
- Pesticides and herbicides
- Dishwasher powders
- Bleaches
- Everyday items used including alcohol, perfumes, cosmetics, shampoos, soaps and detergents
- Cigarettes and cigarette butts
- Petrol, mineral turpentine, methylated spirits and similar
- Many more common household substances when taken in a larger volume than intended.

Real life poisonings

- A child drank insecticide stored in Coca-Cola bottle
- A child crawled into bathroom and opened the cupboard; was found eating Napisan
- At home in kitchen, a child swallowed dishwasher detergent while parent was packing dishwasher.
- At Grandma's, a child was found playing with an empty container of sleeping tablets
- In the rumpus room at home, a child was found playing with mum's bag; he found and swallowed her heart tablets
- While playing in friend's kitchen, a child ate rat poison



Dishwasher detergent

In an emergency

If your child swallows a poison do not try to make them vomit. Pick up the poison's container, the child and take them with you to the phone. Ring the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 (Australia-wide, 24 hours a day). Keep this number by your phone. This service also covers bites and stings.

For further information visit

*www.health.qld.gov.au/PoisonsInformationCentre/

CHOICE at www.choice.com.au for research on effectiveness of dishwasher detergent child resistant lids.

**Data provided by QISU 2006

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For more information ☎ (07) 3854 1829

Email: gld@kidsafe.org.au

Website: www.kidsafeqld.com.au

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