

What to do if a Child is Poisoned



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A poison is any substance which can cause damage if it enters the body in sufficient quantities. A poison can be swallowed, breathed in, absorbed through the skin or injected.

Poisons can cause seizures, blurred vision, and/or major allergic reactions. They can also be fatal. If you suspect a child has been exposed to a potentially harmful substance, follow the guidelines and get them seen by a medical professional as soon as possible. The key to poisoning is prevention. Read our advice on the next sites

How to Prevent Poisoning



In 2015, there were more than 3,700 poison calls as a result of children eating or playing with cleaning products.

It is estimated that as many as **30 children a day** are being poisoned by liquid laundry detergent pods.

A poison is any substance (solid, liquid or gas) which can cause damage if it enters the body in sufficient quantities. Poisons can be swallowed, breathed in, absorbed through the skin or injected.

Prevention is key. The [Childhood Accident Prevention Trust](#) and [Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents](#) both work tirelessly to prevent accidents in children and their websites are full of really useful tips and advice.

- Keep all potentially harmful substances out of reach of small children and ideally in a locked cupboard. This includes laundry detergent capsules, dishwasher tablets, medicines, alcohol, cosmetics, DIY, cleaning and gardening products.
- Although they can be helpful, don't rely on child proof caps and bitter tasting (Bitrex) to keep your child safe.
- Ensure grandparents and visitors are careful about leaving potentially hazardous substances within reach, particularly medication.
- Never decant medication or other products into different containers, always use original containers, clearly labelled, with childproof lids if possible.
- Keep batteries out of reach of small children and ensure batteries in toys, gadgets and birthday cards are firmly secured.
- Fit carbon monoxide alarms and have appliances and alarms regularly checked.
- Be aware of harmful plants – many decorative plants are toxic. Plants can be checked through the [Royal Horticultural Society](#) or by asking your local florist or horticultural nursery.

Learn what to do if a child has been poisoned as next:

What to Do If They Have Been Poisoned

If you suspect a child has swallowed or taken a harmful substance, calmly establish how much has gone and if any has been swallowed.

If the child is perfectly well, call 111 (they have access to the poisons database and can give clear and helpful advice). Call the emergency services if you are seriously worried. Give as much information as you can.

If they have eaten a berry, take and photograph a leaf from the plant to help it to be identified. Don't let your child run around – this will increase their metabolism and could speed up any reaction.

If the poison was a tablet or substance contained in packaging, keep as much evidence as possible of what was taken. Take the packaging with you to hospital.

If the child shows any change in behaviour, starts to vomit or becomes drowsy, call an ambulance and explain clearly what's happened.

Do not take them to hospital in a car unless advised to do so by the emergency services. This is in case they deteriorate on the way to hospital.

Corrosive Substances



Cleaning products and dishwasher tablets contain strong alkalis and burn if swallowed. If you suspect a child has eaten a dishwasher tablet or drunk cleaning product, stay as calm as possible and establish what has happened. Read the packaging advice.

Wipe away any obvious residue from around the child's mouth. Rinse their mouth with milk or water. Give them small sips of these if they have swallowed the substance.

Phone for an ambulance and give them as much information as you can.

- Do **not** make your child sick as the substance will have burnt them as they swallowed it – vomiting will burn them again.
- If they begin to lose consciousness, you may need to give CPR. Protect yourself from the corrosive substance by using a face shield.
- If your child has eaten a button battery, they will need to be taken to A&E for an X-ray. A battery will burn through the intestinal wall. You may not be aware there is a problem until the child becomes visibly unwell.