Poisoning

What is it?

> Injury or death due to swallowing, inhaling, touching or injecting various drugs, chemicals, venoms or gases.

Many substances — such as drugs and carbon monoxide — are poisonous only in higher concentrations or dosages.

Certain types of cleaners are only harmful if ingested, while others also emit toxic gases/fumes.

Symptoms:

Poisoning signs and symptoms can mimic other conditions, such as seizure, alcohol intoxication, stroke and insulin reaction.

May include:

- Burns or redness around the mouth and lips
- Breath that smells like chemicals, such as gasoline or paint thinner
- Vomiting
- Difficulty breathing
- Drowsiness
- Confusion or other altered mental status

If you suspect poisoning, be alert for clues such as empty pill bottles or packages, scattered pills, and burns, stains, and odors on the person or nearby objects.

Plan of Action:

How you treat someone who may have been poisoned depends on:

- The person's symptoms
- The person's age
- Whether you know the type and amount of the substance that caused poisoning

When to call for help:

Call 911 or your local emergency number immediately if the person is:

- Drowsy or unconscious
- Having difficulty breathing or has stopped breathing
- Uncontrollably restless or agitated
- Having seizures
- Known to have taken medications, or any other substance, intentionally or accidentally overdosed (in these situations the poisoning typically involves larger amounts, often along with alcohol)

Call Poison Help at 800-222-1222 in the United States or your regional poison control center in the following situations:

- The person is stable and has no symptoms
- The person is going to be transported to the local emergency department

Be ready to describe the person's symptoms, age, weight, other medications he or she is taking, and any information you have about the poison. Try to determine the amount ingested and how long since the person was exposed to it. If possible, have on hand the pill bottle, medication package or other suspect container so that you can refer to its label when speaking with the poison control center.

What to do while waiting for help:

- **Swallowed poison.** Remove anything remaining in the person's mouth. If the suspected poison is a household cleaner or other chemical, read the container's label and follow instructions for accidental poisoning.
- **Poison on the skin.** Remove any contaminated clothing using gloves. Rinse the skin for 15 to 20 minutes in a shower or with a hose.
- **Poison in the eye.** Gently flush the eye with cool or lukewarm water for 20 minutes or until help arrives.
- **Inhaled poison.** Get the person into fresh air as soon as possible.

- **If the person vomits,** turn his or her head to the side to prevent choking.
- **Begin CPR if the person shows no signs of life,** such as moving, breathing or coughing.
- **Call Poison Help at 800-222-1222** in the United States or your regional poison control for additional instructions.
- **Have somebody gather pill bottles, packages or containers with labels,** and any other information about the poison to send along with the ambulance team.

In the case of an opioid overdose:

If the person is at risk of overdose of opioid pain medication and naloxone (Narcan) is available, please administer.

Increasingly, health care providers are giving people Narcan injectable prescriptions if they are at risk of overdose. Loved ones should be familiar with how to use them.

Caution

- **Syrup of ipecac.** Don't give syrup of ipecac or do anything to induce vomiting. Expert groups, including the American Association of Poison Control Centers and the American Academy of Pediatrics, no longer endorse using ipecac in children or adults who have taken pills or other potentially poisonous substances. No good evidence proves its effectiveness, and it often can do more harm than good.

If you still have old bottles of syrup of ipecac, throw them away.

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