

TOXICTRIVIA

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Spring Safety

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Medications Remain Leading Cause of Poisoning Deaths

Medications remained the leading cause of poisoning deaths in 2009, with most poisoning fatalities occurring among adults, according to a new report by the **American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC)**.

U.S. poison centers took more than 4.2 million calls in 2009, treating more than 2.4 million poison exposures and answering more than 1.6 million additional questions. The report, based on data from 2009



calls to U.S. poison centers, found that sedative/hypnotic/ antipsychotics; cardiovascular drugs, opioid and acetaminophen combinations were most frequently associated with poison-related deaths. Poison centers reported 1,158 poison-related fatalities in 2009.

Children younger than six were involved in the majority of all poison exposures reported to poison centers in 2009, but accounted for just 1.8 percent of poison-related fatalities that year. Most fatalities occurred in people between the ages of 20

1. On the TV show *“Seinfeld”*, what poisons and kills George’s fiancée?

and 59.

More than 91 percent of all poison exposures occurred in a residence. Most patients were treated at home: More than 72 percent of calls from the general public were managed at home, meaning patients avoided costly emergency care.

Among other findings in the report:

- The top five substance classes most frequently involved in all human exposures were analgesics (11.7 percent); cosmetics/personal care products (7.7 percent); household cleaning substances (7.4 percent); sedative/hypnotic/antipsychotics (5.8 percent); foreign bodies/toys/miscellaneous (4.3 percent).
- While 91.19 percent of all poison exposures occurred in the home, poison exposures also occurred in the workplace (1.51 percent); in school (1.26 percent) and in restaurants or food service establishments (.24 percent).

The report is based on information from the National Poison Data System (NPDS), which tracks every call made to a U.S. poison center in near real-time, serving as a national resource to collect and monitor U.S. poison exposure and serving as one of the few real-time national surveillance systems in place to track health trends. The full report is available online at www.aapcc.org.

Be Poison-Smart When Buying a Home

Buying a home can be a stressful experience in and of itself, with home inspections, offers and counter-offers and clos-



ings creating a bureaucratic minefield for buyers. But if you think that’s stressful, try buying a house only to realize that there are a myriad of health hazards to fix. Lead and radon are among the toxins that can make a new home a headache and a hazard.

The Indiana Poison Center (IPC) wants home-buyers to shop smart when they look for a new place to live. Here are a few things to look for when you’re shopping for a new house – or items to invest in before moving in.

Carbon monoxide (CO) and smoke detectors

Make sure homes have both smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors. CO is an invisible gas and you won’t know if it’s present without a detector to warn you. If your house doesn’t have detectors, buy them. Some municipalities

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Toxic Trivia
This issue’s questions are all related to movies and television



Answers are on page 4 - good luck!

POISON PREVENTION

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have rules about how many to have and where to put them. Put CO detectors near bedrooms, and make sure their batteries are replaced regularly.

- Know which fuel-burning appliances and equipment can be a source of carbon monoxide poisoning if not vented and/or maintained properly.
- Know the history of the appliances and heating system in the home. Gather service records if possible. Knowing a little about your appliances and heating system can help you know when it's appropriate to replace furnaces, water heaters, gas dryers, wood-burning stoves and gas ranges, which all pose CO risks.

Lead

- Know the age of your home. Homes built before 1950 are highly likely to contain lead paint and homes built before 1978 may also contain this toxic paint.
- Look for paint chips or flaking lead-based paint. Window sills and doorways are common locations.
- Test for lead hazards in the home including the soil. Tests can be purchased at home improvement stores.

Pests

- Look for entry points like gaps surrounding pipes and holes in walls.
- Identify sources of food, water and shelter. Pests are not able to survive without all three. Make your home inhospitable to them.
- If you see evidence of pests, know the enemy - identify the specific type of pest that's in your home. Use integrated pest-management techniques to rid the house of pests (use non-chemical methods first). If you need to use pesticides, read the label first and take precautions or hire a professional.

2. What is the name of the 1963 science fiction movie featuring plants that could walk and kill people with their stingers?

Radon

You can't see, smell or taste radon, but it could be a problem in your home.

- Radon is estimated to cause about 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year. If you breathe air containing radon, you can increase your risk for lung cancer, especially if you smoke. In fact radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States today.
- Test your home for radon. What you can't see can have long-term health consequences—remember, radon is odorless and colorless.
- Pick up a testing kit at your local hardware store or hire a professional to test for radon. Check with your health department for a list of qualified professionals who can test and/or fix radon problems in your home.



American Association of Poison Control Centers Launches Smartphone Application

You scan coupon barcodes, check-in at your favorite restaurant, and update your Facebook status from your iPhone, why not call your poison center with it, too? The American Association of Poison Control Centers has released free smartphone apps that will allow users to connect with their poison center with the touch of a button. The first app available will be the iPhone, with Blackberry, Droid and Windows 7 apps to follow.

The app will allow users to click on the Poison Help logo to contact poison centers. It will also offer poison prevention



tips and connect users with the American Association of Poison Control Center's website. It will help users get in touch with the expert

nurses and pharmacists at the Indiana Poison Center who can help them with a poisoning emergency or question.

- Did your toddler invade the vitamin bottle?
- Did you get bitten by an outdoor critter?
- Did your aging parent take an extra dose or the wrong dose of their medicine?

Use the poison control center app to contact poison center experts immediately, because in a poisoning emergency, there's no time to waste. The iPhone app is available at www.aapcc.org or through your app marketplace, with others following in the coming months.

Why call the Poison Center when I have Google?

If you can't find your recipe for no bake cookies or can't remember how many legs a spider has, you may instinctively turn to Google for the answers. It's strange to think that Google has only been in existence for 12 years, since turning to the internet for answers to our questions has quickly become routine for all of us. Google has even become a verb in the dictionary.

3. In which Disney movie can you hear the line, "Drown them, poison them, bash them on the head. Got any chloroform? I don't care how you kill the little beasts, just do it!" being delivered by actress Glen Close?

4. In the 1981 film “Clash of the Titans”, Perseus battles giant venomous creatures that spring from the blood of Medusa. What type of creatures did he battle?

So, is Google “golden” or not? Are there any restrictions on what type of information Google can be trusted to provide? How about poison information, for example? Is it really necessary to call the Indiana Poison Center when Google is so readily available?

Studies have shown that turning to Google for a poisoning emergency may not be your best bet. One such study compared the *Wikipedia* database to the *Poisindex* database commonly used by poison centers. The authors looked at 22 common poisoning substances and examined each substance in both databases.

The information was evaluated in 2009 and then again in 2010 to see if it had been updated. The authors found that *Wikipedia* did not provide all of the information in all of the categories evaluated for 21 of 22 items. None of the entries mentioned poison centers or provided the 1-800-222-1222 poison emergency number. There was one instance of incorrect information being provided and there was only one update over the 12 month period. In comparison, *Poisindex* provided information on all of the products in all of the categories, had no obvious errors, and was updated during the 12 month period.

A second study surveyed 21 parents of children of pediatric patients at the UCSF Children’s Hospital and UCSF Pediatric Urgent Care about their internet access and use, as well as the search engines and terms they would use in cases of possible poisoning. They used this information to imitate parent searches for the 11 most common substances involved in pediatric poisonings. A panel of poison experts evaluated each website on 2 standards. The first

standard was whether the site recommended to call the poison center and gave the correct 800 number (38% of the websites met the first standard.) The second standard was whether the site gave correct, adequate and appropriate treatment recommendations to manage the exposure without healthcare staff intervention (70% of sites gave information on potential for poisoning, ingredients and symptoms.) At the same time, only approximately 20% gave information on toxic dose, management site, or first aid.



So, is the internet a reliable source during a poison emergency? The answer is a resounding, “No.” The above studies support the idea that although the internet is a fascinating source of information, at the same time, it is only one of many sources. The internet needs to be reviewed as carefully as any other scientific source. Remember that there is no editorial control over many internet sites’ contents, and that anyone can post on the internet. No matter how convincing a site appears to be, it needs to be approached with some skepticism. This recommendation can be a difficult thing to remember since we have an inclination to believe that if something is in writing it must be accurate.

“Good” sites to refer to for health information will be sponsored by:

- The US government or a major university or medical / pharmaceutical firm such as www.cdc.gov, www.fda.gov, www.cpsc.gov,

www.mayoclinic.com

- A major clinical journal (*Clinical Toxicology* for poisonings)
- A reliable, well-known work of literature (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Encarta*, *National Library of Medicine*)
- A well-known, reliable physician (Dr. Oz, the surgeon general) or similar persons

What is the difference between *Wikipedia* and *Encyclopedia Britannica*?

Wikipedia is a “user generated content” encyclopedia, a work in progress, being developed by contributions from the public, without any significant supporting documentation. *Encyclopedia Britannica* on the other hand is a researched and documented text.

Besides concerns about the reliability and validity of the data available to you on the internet, what are some other good reasons to call the **Indiana Poison Center** instead of going to the web?

- Speak to a “live” person right away
- Get free, confidential help from a poison expert
- Get help to decide if you have a true medical emergency or if the poisoning can be handled at home (most of the time situations can be handled at home with the help of a poison center specialist)
- If you do need to go to a hospital, the poison center will call ahead so emergency room staff is ready and has the treatment information on hand when the poisoned person arrives
- Specially trained nurses and pharmacists are available 24 hours every day at the Indiana Poison Center to give immediate, expert help.

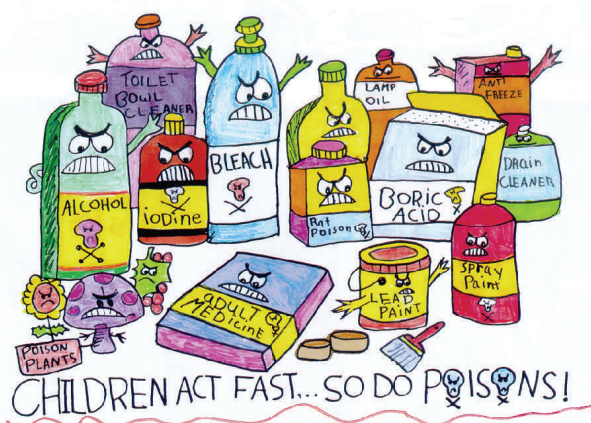
5. In a classic *Bugs Bunny* episode, *Bugs* was captured by *Witch Hazel*, but not chopped up because he reminded her of her toxic pet “Paul”. What kind of pet was “Paul”?

How to teach poison safety to children

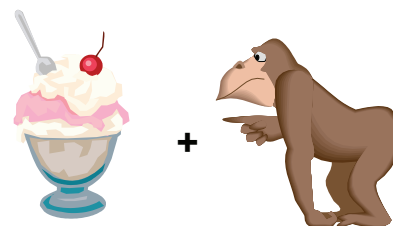
- Do you teach injury prevention programs for preschool and/or elementary school children?
- Are you looking for a new safety topic?
- Would you like to promote poison safety in your own community?

If you answered “yes” - the Indiana Poison Center can help you teach poison safety.

Who?	For people who teach injury prevention programs for preschool and elementary school children.
How long?	3 hours. Provides strategies and effective tools to teach poison safety to children and information to get the poison safety message home to parents.
How much?	The workshop is FREE
Where?	Methodist Hospital, Indianapolis
When?	From 12-3pm, once every month



For more information contact: **Barbara Cole, 317-962-9248 or bcole@iuhealth.org**



And the winner is.....

Did you guess the correct answer to what the above call to the poison center was?

Someone reached for a bottle of syrup to put on their ice-cream sundae and grabbed Gorilla Glue™ instead! This demonstrates why potential poisons should never be stored with food or beverage containers.

The winner of the contest received a \$20 gift card to Wal-Mart.

Congratulations go to our winner,

Articles from this issue of *Toxic Trivia* may be reproduced in newsletters, etc, as long as:

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Janice Hosmer, EMS Coordinator at

- Answers to Toxic**
1. She licks engagement envelopes that have toxic glue.
 2. "Day of the Trifids"
 3. "101 Dalmations"
 4. Scorpions
 5. A tarantula

To see a color copy of "Toxic Trivia" go to: www.clarian.org/poisoncontrol