

Adults can prevent child poisoning

There are 2,000 ways to poison a child.

Hoard old medicine until its use is forgotten. Explain that mom or dad is taking some candy when medicine is ingested in front of toddlers.

Allow cans of gasoline, kerosene and drain cleaner to stand open in child accessible areas.

Undermine the usefulness of child-proof caps by setting them on top of the bottle, because otherwise the container will be difficult to open. It's frighteningly easy to poison a child.

"Parents aren't as cautious as they should be," said Juanita Walker, head pediatric nurse at Botsford Hospital, Farmington Hills. "There's a Children's Hospital film entitled '2,000 Ways to Poison a Child at Home.' It's true."

Something that is obnoxious to adults doesn't seem to bother children, for some reason. They're not offended by things like kerosene and drain cleaner," she said.

Most of the children who are taken into Botsford's emergency room after

taking a poison are between 2 and 5 years old, according to Mrs. Walker. "Preschoolers don't have enough to keep them busy," she said.

"ONCE THEY get into school, they don't have so much time to get into trouble," she said.

After watching their parents take medicine, many children are under the impression it's really candy. When they come into possession of some pills, they are mindful to share them with their friends, she said.

"Two to three children will sometimes take the same drug at the same time," Mrs. Walker said. "They're told to share and that's what they do. They share."

Children will share everything from their parents' methadone to baby aspirin with their friends.

"Doctors prescribe so much of one drug to a patient that it stays around the house," Mrs. Walker said. "A doctor should set limits on the amount of drugs a patient should have."

Manufacturers of baby aspirin have reduced the number of pills in their

bottles to prevent toddlers from overdosing on pleasantly flavored medicine.

"There used to be 50 to 100 pills in a bottle of baby aspirin. Now there are about 35. And there are not as many aspirin overdoses since they put less in a bottle," she said.

Often it is the flavoring in the medicine that attracts children. "They've made everything so attractive. We didn't have problems when they kept medicine in its old form," Mrs. Walker said.

Often, parents will begin to notice that something is wrong when the child begins to vomit.

"Parents don't realize what a child has taken. If they don't know, they should keep the child's stomach contents. Doctors can analyze the contents," she advised.

If an active child becomes sedate or if the odor of medicine or kerosene can be picked up around a child, parents should call the Poison Control Center at 494-5711 for advice.

Parents should keep on hand a bottle of syrup of Ipecac for emergencies. The medicine induces vomiting.

"Call the Poison Control Center before you give a child the Ipecac," urges Mrs. Walker. "There are some poisons that shouldn't be allowed to be vomited. If a child took Ipecac, you don't want it to go back up and cause twice as much damage to the throat and mouth."

IF A CHILD has taken gasoline or kerosene, he or she should drink milk to neutralize the poisons.

To prevent an emergency, lock all medicines out of reach of children. Mrs. Walker remembers an 11-year-old boy who took a bottle of sleeping pills to get even with his parents for leaving him at home.

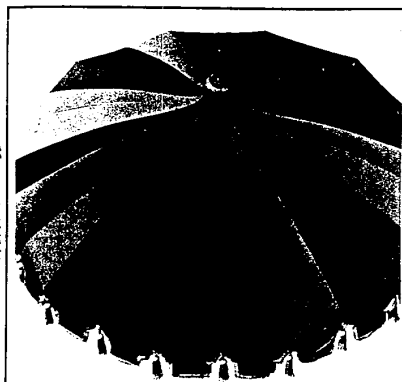
"They found him three hours later," she said. "He was in a coma for two days. And when they took him home, he was still in a trance most of the time. What a sad little boy. That happened 20 years ago, but I haven't forgotten him."

Most child poisoning cases are handled in the emergency room. A hospital stay is necessary when the child has taken a substance that would cause a shutdown of his kidneys, ulcers in the mouth or throat and stomach inflammation.

"Less than five per cent of the children who come into our emergency room stay in the hospital," she said.

At present, two of Mrs. Walker's charges are victims of poisoning. One child drank oil of wintergreen, an old-fashioned liniment with a high aspirin content. One teaspoon is enough to kill a child.

"You have to watch a child," Mrs. Walker said. "You can be polishing furniture, turn your back to answer the phone and the child will go for the polish," she said.



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