



Watch out for Holiday Poison Hazards

During the hustle and bustle of the holidays, it's easy to overlook the fact that some of the most unsuspecting items in homes can pose a real hazard. Accidental poisonings often occur when daily household routines become disrupted, as is common during the holidays.

You can take steps to help ensure that your holiday season is safe and merry by being aware of the following potential hazards:

Alcohol: Children are more apt to drink unfinished alcoholic beverages during holidays when parties and celebrations are taking place. Alcohol can be very dangerous to small children, as well as to pets. For example, ingesting three ounces of hard liquor, such as whiskey, vodka or gin, is potentially fatal to a child weighing 25 pounds. You also should be aware that alcohol is a key ingredient in mouthwash, cough preparations and colognes.

The symptoms of an alcohol overdose may be mild, such as stimulation, dizziness and nausea, or they may progress to more serious complications, such as vomiting, drowsiness, difficulty breathing, coma and death. More problematic in children than adults is the ability of alcohol to lower blood sugar to a level which deprives the body's major organs of this essential nutrient, thus adding to the danger of the poisoning.

Christmas Decorations: Angel hair consists of spun glass, which can penetrate the eyes and mouth on contact, causing severe irritation and pain. For skin exposures, the glass fragments can be removed by rubbing Play-Doh® or a fresh ball of bread over the exposed area. It is best to avoid decorating with this substance altogether.

Solid wax candles are considered non-poisonous; neither coloring nor scent is present in an amount large enough to be significant. However, if large amounts are swallowed, diarrhea may

develop. Liquid fuels in glass candle lamps can be very dangerous and should be kept well out of children's reach.

Christmas tree ornaments have the potential to cut or block air passageways if they are swallowed, so keep them high out of the reach of small children. Often, food products are used as centerpieces or tree decorations after being sprayed with a clear varnish or lacquer. These may look appealing to young children, who may try to eat them. When wet, varnish contains dangerous petroleum distillates, but when dry, it is non-poisonous.

Snow spray can cause eye damage if sprayed directly into the eye from a pressurized container. Follow the warning labels on the container.

Fireplace powders and logs which burn different colors contain heavy metals, such as lead, copper, barium and selenium. Ingestion of heavy metals can cause intense stomach and intestinal upset, along with other harmful symptoms. Large amounts of the log or powder would have to be ingested to cause serious problems.

Christmas trees: Evergreens, such as balsams, cedar, fir, juniper and pine, possess toxic oils. However, ingestion seldom results in a toxic reaction because large amounts are not normally consumed. The yew tree is very poisonous and should not be used in homes with small children. Essential oils from these plants are often sold as aromatic fragrances. In the pure form, they can be extremely dangerous if a small droplet makes its way into the lungs. Pine cones are generally considered non-poisonous.

Plants: The IPC reminds people to always label or keep a record available of the species names of all the plants in your home. **Non-toxic holiday plants** that are safe for your home include:

- Bayberry
- Christmas begonia
- Christmas cactus
- Christmas cheers
- Christmas dagger fern
- Christmas flower-see poinsettia
- Christmas kalanchoe
- Christmas pride
- Winter begonia
- Mistletoe cactus (not to be confused with regular mistletoe)
- Poinsettia (despite rumors, there is no evidence to support the idea that this plant is toxic)

Toxic holiday plants you may want to avoid having in your home include:

- Amaryllis
- Azalea
- Boxberry
- Christmas berry
- Christmas cherry
- Christmas pepper
- Christmas rose
- Holly
- Chrysanthemum
- Mistletoe (this is the most deadly of all holiday plants)
- Jerusalem cherry
- Rhododendron
- Winter broom
- Winter cherry

Post the IPC's number, 1-800-222-1222, on or near your telephone and call the IPC if you suspect anyone has been exposed to a poisonous substance, even if no symptoms are present. The nationwide, toll-free poison center number, 1-800-222-1222, automatically connects callers with their designated local poison center, from anywhere in the U.S. All calls placed in Illinois will be routed to the IPC. Poison specialists at the IPC will advise you of the proper action to take.