

Fact Sheets for Families

Do Not Use Ipecac

In 2001, 1.2 million children under age 6 swallowed a poisonous substance, according to the American Association of Poison Centers. Because accidental poisonings of young children happen so frequently, in the past few decades the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has recommended that parents keep a bottle of syrup of ipecac in the home to induce vomiting if children swallow something poisonous. In a new policy statement "Poison Treatment in the Home," AAP recommends that syrup of ipecac no longer be used as a home treatment by parents or caregivers to make a child vomit a possible poison he or she has swallowed.

What is ipecac?

Syrup of ipecac is a medicine made from the dried root of ipecac plant, which is grown in Brazil. When swallowed, ipecac stimulates the central nervous system and the stomach, causing vomiting in about 20 minutes.

Why did AAP make this new recommendation?

There are several reasons for this decision. The key reason is that ipecac was never proven to be effective in preventing poisoning or in showing benefits for children treated with this medicine. Although it seems to make sense to induce vomiting for treatment of swallowed poison, nevertheless this assumption was never tested or researched. In the past few years, scientific tests and research have shown vomiting will not help children who eat or drink something poisonous.

Research has also shown that ipecac has been improperly administered by parents and abused by people with eating disorders (misuse of ipecac can lead to heart problems and even death). Most emergency rooms have stopped using ipecac in favor of activated charcoal. Scientific advisers to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommended banning over-the-counter sales of ipecac.

What should you do if you still have syrup of ipecac?

Syrup of ipecac should be disposed of in a safe manner such as flushing it down the toilet.

Tips for protecting your children against poisoning

Prevention is the best defense against unintentional poisoning.

- Keep potential poisons locked out of sight and out of reach of children.
- Select products with child-resistant covers and replace child-resistant caps immediately after use. Remember, nothing is child proof!
- Do not turn your back on a child when a hazardous product is in use.
- Keep all products in their original containers. Never put them into food containers.
- Store hazardous household products and food in separate areas.
- Get rid of old and unused medicines properly (including ipecac).
- Never tell children that medicine or vitamins are candy.
- Keep toxic plants out of reach of children.
- Poison can look like food or drink. Teach children to ask an adult before eating or drinking anything.

If your child swallows a potentially poisonous substance, do not panic.

- Do not use syrup of ipecac as a poison treatment intervention.
- If a child is in obvious distress (is having convulsions, has lost consciousness or has stopped breathing), call 9-1-1 for help.
- Otherwise call poison control at (800) 876-4766 in California and (800) 222-1222 outside California for help and instructions.

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Resource

California Poison Control at (800) 876-4766. Free poison control stickers, magnets and other materials are available at www.calpoison.org.

References

American Academy of Pediatrics, Volume 112, November 5, 2003, pp 1182-1185.

Health and Safety in the Child Care Setting: Prevention of Injuries, Module 2, 2nd. Edition, California Childcare Health Program, 2001.



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