



News Release

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Plant Safety

The long awaited Spring is finally here bringing warmer temperatures, longer days and lots of greenery. Children will be spending more time outdoors now finding interesting things to explore, including plants.

Adults and older children are able to enjoy the beauty of plants while understanding that although plants may be pretty, at the same time some can be poisonous if eaten. On the other hand, young children tend to think that poison is something which looks, tastes and smells bad. Plants, which are “pretty poisons” may not be seen as a danger by young children. The fragrance and attractive colors of flowers and berries can be deceptive for young children and may be mistaken for something that is good to eat.

In reality, plants, including both house and garden varieties, are among the top ten agents that cause poisoning in young children under the age of six. According to **Dr. James Mowry**, Director of the **Indiana Poison Center**, “In the Midwest there are hundreds of poisonous plants that are capable of causing illness or injury in dozens of ways. The potential symptoms of toxicity depend on the specific plant involved. Most exposures occur in the spring and summer months and they make up nearly ten percent of all the poison exposures in young children reported by poison centers each year.”

So, what can you do to keep young children safe around plants?

1. **Identify every plant in both your home and yard.** If you are not sure what a certain plant is, take a sample to a nursery or greenhouse for identification. An adequate sample consists of a large piece of the plant, including leaves, stems, berries, flowers or whatever is growing on that plant at that time. Identification of a single leaf or berry is virtually impossible. House, garden and wild plants, "weeds", trees and shrubs should *all* be identified. If your child *does* eat part of a plant and you need call the poison center, the poison specialist will be able to help you more quickly if you know the name of the plant. *The Indiana Poison Center does not identify plants via pictures sent from phones or e-mail and it is nearly impossible to identify a plant by description alone over the phone.* Don't delay calling the poison center to attempt to identify the plant – *if you don't know, the poison specialist can still help care for your child immediately and assist you in obtaining the identification from a source close at hand.*
2. If your child spends time with a babysitter or family member, remind them that they too should know what kinds of plants they have in their yards and homes.
3. *Label all plants with their proper name* (preferably the common name *and* the botanical name). Write the name on tape with permanent ink and place it on the bottom or outside of the planter. Make a rough sketch of your yard and garden, including location and name of trees, bushes and plants. Keep this "map" posted in a convenient place in your home, so that anyone caring for your child will be able to use it to identify plants, if necessary.
4. Consider buying silk or other imitation flowers if young children live in or visit your home (keep in mind that these can be a choking hazard). Supervise young children at all times when they play outside.

5. Keep children away from plants with berries. The color, shape and texture of berries are very attractive to young children. Berries are found on garden and wild plants, but they may also be part of dried flower arrangements.
6. Remove all mushrooms in the yard, especially after rainy spells in spring and fall. Most reported deaths from mushrooms result from adults who have intentionally eaten wild mushrooms. A death from a child eating mushrooms growing in a yard in Indiana has not been reported. But, identification of mushrooms is very time consuming, even for experts, so it is best to assume all varieties are toxic. ***It is important to call the Poison Center if any portion of a wild mushroom is eaten.***
7. Contact the Poison Center even if you just *suspect* a poisoning. Plant material may be digested slowly and symptoms of poisoning can be delayed. Don't wait for problems to develop, instead, call the Poison Center immediately at **1-800-222-1222**.

To learn more about ways to keep your family safe from poison, and to receive a free magnet and phone stickers, call the Indiana Poison Center at **1-800-222-1222**, or visit the Center's website at www.clarian.org/poisoncontrol. For a poisoning emergency, call the Poison Center immediately at **1-800-222-1222**. Experts are standing by twenty-four hours a day to help you.

The Indiana Poison Center is an independent, non-profit, agency providing coverage and services for the entire state of Indiana. It serves as both an emergency telephone service and an information resource center, with services accessible to the general public and health care professionals 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. The IPC is the designated Regional Poison Information Center for Indiana and is certified by the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It is a collaborative effort of the Indiana State Department of Health, Clarian Health, the Federal Health Resources Services Administration and health care providers throughout the state.