

December, 2014

Virginia Poison Center
VCU Medical Center
Richmond, VA



Berries Make Beautiful Decorations But Can be Dangerous



Mistletoe: Although American mistletoe is not as poisonous as the European variety, eating more than two or three berries may cause illness in children.



Holly Berries: The bright red berries are very attractive to a small child. They can cause mild vomiting and diarrhea if more than one or two berries are eaten. Animals may experience heart problems after eating the berries, but this has not been noted with humans.



Nandina Berries: To date, there have been no reports of toxic effects in humans after eating the berries. However, the bark and leaves are toxic and can cause shortness of breath, weakness, and seizures.



Liriope (monkey grass) Berries: These dark purple-blue berries are beautiful and attract children and wildlife. There have been no reports of human poisoning from these berries. If symptoms are noted after eating the berries, treat symptomatically.



Pokeweed Berries: These berries are dark purple when ripe and are quite juicy, leaving stains on children and pets when the play with or eat them. Children and pets that eat less than 10 berries will not experience severe illness but can experience nausea and vomiting.

Beware of Holiday Hazards

The Virginia Poison Center wishes you and your family a Happy and Safe Holiday Season! This time of year is filled with festive celebration but can also bring potential poisoning to our family and friends. Visiting relatives carry potentially hazardous medications in their suitcases and purses, alcohol is often served and left out giving access for a young child to drink, or the dog may eat a box of chocolates left under the tree. Your first mode of protection is to program **1-800-222-1222** into your phone so you have immediate access to nurses and doctors who specialize in poisonings.

The Virginia Poison Center receives numerous calls during the winter holiday season when children and animals eat decorations such as tinsel, ornaments, and artificial snow. There is no scientific data that eating a small amount of these decorations or common holiday plants (poinsettia, holly berries or mistletoe) will put your life at any risk. Many of these items can cause choking if swallowed or may cause stomach irritation and should be kept away from children and pets.

The most serious risks during the holidays are from alcohol, button batteries, and lead paint which may be on antique ornaments and decorations. Children are especially at risk for poisoning from beer, wine, or liquor. Children who drink alcohol may experience dangerous drops in blood sugar levels, sedation, seizures and death. These beverages should always be stored out of reach of children. Clean up leftovers on coffee tables immediately as only a small amount can cause serious illness. Adults should always plan for a designated driver and beware of Holiday Heart Syndrome which can cause a rapid, fluttering heart rate in some people when medications are mixed with alcoholic beverages. Button batteries are in many toys, musical cards, and remote controls. If swallowed they can cause choking, esophageal erosion and injuries.

You may call the Virginia Poison Center or visit www.vapoison.org to obtain a free copy of our Holiday Poisoning Hazards Fact Sheet.

Did You Know?

One level tablespoon of table salt or rock salt (for melting ice) can poison a child?

Call the Virginia Poison Center immediately at **1-800-222-1222** if a person or animal eats any table or raw salt product.



Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas and is sometimes called the “silent killer”. The early signs of carbon monoxide poisoning are very easily missed because it has no smell or taste and you can’t see it. Every device that burns fuel will produce carbon monoxide gas. If an area is not appropriately ventilated when one of these devices is in use, there is a potential for carbon monoxide poisoning.

These are some of the devices that can make CO:

- Wood stoves
- Fireplaces
- Furnaces that use gas or oil
- Gas stoves and ovens
- Gas water heaters
- Kerosene heaters
- Car engines
- Power generators

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF CO POISONING?

Early signs are: Headaches, dizziness, weakness, nausea and a fast heartbeat.

Serious signs are: Vomiting, loss of consciousness, heart attack, seizures, and coma.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR CO POISONING?

Make sure the area is safe before entering. If it is not safe to enter, call 911 for Fire Department assistance.

Move the person(s) to fresh air. Call the Virginia Poison center at **1-800-222-1222** if the person is still awake. Call 911 if the person is having any serious signs of CO poisoning or is unresponsive.

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Prevention Strategies

Ensure medications are appropriately stored out of the reach of children and in child resistant containers. Store in a locked cabinet if available.

Use artificial plants and berries for decorating or choose non-toxic plants.

Keep alcohol in locked cabinets and open drinks outside of children’s reach.

Use a pet and child safe brand of ice melt. Check the label for “salt free” products.

Pick up and put away potentially hazardous gifts once opened.

Install at least one CO detector in your home. The best places for these are near sleeping areas and on the opposite wall from a fireplace, stove or other heating unit.

Never run a car engine in an enclosed garage.

Have heating systems and fireplaces inspected every year and keep maintenance done as needed by heating professionals.

NEVER burn charcoal or other fuels inside a home, garage or tent.

Generators should always remain outside and far enough from the home to prevent fumes from coming into windows or openings in the home.

Program the Virginia Poison Center number into your home and cell phones.

1-800-222-1222



*Happy Holidays from
the
Virginia Poison Center!*