

Poison Prevention Press

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What is a Poison?

A poison is any product or substance that can harm someone if it is used

- in the wrong way
- by the wrong person
- in the wrong amount

Poisons can be household cleaners, personal care products, medicines, chemicals, pesticides, automotive products, plants and berries, bites and stings, gases and vapors.

People of all ages can be poisoned. Most poisonings are unintentional. The MPC manages about 64% of calls right at home or where the exposure occurred.

Be prepared for the unexpected. Program 1-800-222-1222 in your cell phone now, before you need it. Fast, confidential, expert help is a phone call away!

Did you know that...

- in 2014, the MPC managed 186 calls involving single load laundry packets and 86 calls involving liquid laundry detergents.
- of the 186 calls involving single load laundry packets, 174 were about children under the age of 6 years.



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Single Load Laundry Packets

Single load laundry packets were created to make doing laundry easier and less messy. One packet can be used for a load of laundry without having to measure powder or liquid detergent. These laundry packets are very concentrated. The clear covering dissolves in water of any temperature. It can quickly dissolve in a child's mouth. No teeth required. Children can also confuse the packets with candy because of their bright colors. They are fun to play with because they are squishy. But they can easily break when squeezed by a child. This can lead to the liquid squirting on the skin or into the eye or mouth.



Photo courtesy of the Iowa Poison Center

Starting in 2012, U.S. poison centers reported an increase in calls about laundry packets. Most calls involve children aged 5 years and younger. In 2014, there were 11,714 calls about children aged 5 years and younger that got into laundry packets. Already in 2015 there have been about 3,000 exposures to laundry packets.

The detergent can cause burns in a child's throat and stomach. It can also get in a child's lungs making it hard to breathe. There has been one death caused by laundry packets and many other serious injuries.

Mild symptoms include:

- nausea
- vomiting
- coughing
- choking
- mouth and throat irritation
- eye redness and burning

Severe symptoms include:

- burns in the mouth and throat
- corneal injury
- trouble breathing
- coma
- death

Exposure to laundry detergent packets may be associated with severe health effects. Parents and caregivers should keep laundry packets out of reach and out of sight of children. Do not give the packets to young children so they can help with the laundry. Leave the packet in its container until you are ready to put it in the washing machine. Putting it on top of the washing machine or on a table while you are loading the clothes gives young children access to the packet.

If you suspect someone has swallowed a laundry detergent packet or has gotten the liquid in their eyes, call the poison center right away at 1-800-222-1222. A pharmacist or nurse will guide you on next steps. Time is of the essence. If as the person is having trouble breathing, call 911. Do not make your child vomit. This may worsen symptoms as the child may choke and get the contents in their lungs.

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