



Maryland Poison Center and Emergency Medical Services: Vital Public Services Working Together

The Maryland Poison Center is designated by MIEMSS as a specialty referral center for EMS providers in Maryland. Pharmacists and nurses who are nationally certified as Specialists in Poison Information staff the poison center 24/7. The specialists handle more than 65,000 calls each year!

The **Maryland Poison Center is a valuable tool for medical consultations**, and poison center staff can give the best treatment advice for each patient. Our professionals follow that patient through their hospital stay, continuing to make treatment recommendations, and keep records on outcomes and treatments. This information allows us to continually assess the effects of drugs, chemicals, and poison treatments. Patients managed with poison center expertise on average experience shorter hospitalizations (median length of stay of 2 days versus 5 days without poison center assistance) helping healthcare providers serve more patients and decrease healthcare costs. (*J Toxicol Environ Health Part A. 2007; 70(2): 107-110*).

The information we provide includes:

- * Assessment of poisonings, overdoses, and envenomations
- * Range of toxicity (toxic dose information)
- * Overdose and poisoning signs and symptoms
- * Toxidrome identification
- * Specific treatment recommendations for each patient
- * Decontamination recommendations
- * Assistance locating antidotes and antivenom
- * Drug interactions
- * Pill identification
- * Identification of chemicals that may be hazardous to first responders and providers
- * Access to public health emergency information (i.e., H1N1, food recalls, terrorism)

In addition to the above, **the specialists who answer your call can determine whether EMS transport is needed.** In many cases, consultation with the poison center through 911 can avoid a trip to the hospital saving health care resources. More than 70% of all calls to the poison center are managed outside of a health care facility with poison center advice. An Institute of Medicine study in 2004 estimated that every dollar spent on poison centers saves at least \$7 in health care costs, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimated that poison centers save more than \$1 billion in public healthcare costs per year!

Can EMS providers share patient information with the poison center?

Absolutely! Poison centers fall under “covered entities” in the HIPAA Privacy Rule regulations. (45 CFR 164.501, 506(c)) and are considered part of the health care team. Calls and patient information are kept confidential, and poison centers are held to the same HIPAA requirements that other health care providers abide by.

What happens to the information I give to the poison center?

All of our calls are entered into a data collection system as the call is taken. The data we gather is encoded and shared nationally through the National Poison Data System (NPDS), a data collection system that is administered by the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC). **Calls are analyzed in real-time for trends and events that might be of public health significance** (e.g. food poisoning, outbreaks, product recalls, terrorism). All U.S. poison centers transmit their cases, resulting in the largest actively monitored public health database of its kind.

What other services does the Maryland Poison Center offer to EMS providers?

The staff of the Maryland Poison Center is actively involved in the training of EMS providers through classes, drills, continuing education presentations, and onsite training at the poison center. Additionally, the Maryland Poison Center publishes **ToxTidbits**, a monthly e-newsletter for health professionals. Topics include the toxicity of specific poisons and drugs, antidote use, drug abuse trends and more. To view past issues and to sign up to receive email notices of new issues, go to our website: <http://www.mdpoison.com/publications>. For more information on health professional education programs, go to <http://www.mdpoison.com/education/professional.html> or send an email to lbooze@rx.umaryland.edu.

How can EMS providers help the Maryland Poison Center?

Consulting with a poison center on **all** poisonings helps us to identify public health threats such as terrorism and food poisoning. In addition, we analyze and research cases that we’ve been consulted on to determine the effectiveness of treatments and to identify where our public education efforts are needed. EMS providers can **help us help the public!** Educational materials such as pamphlets, telephone stickers and magnets, and posters are available from the Maryland Poison Center for school visits, health fairs, open houses and safety days. By promoting the Maryland Poison Center, you can prevent poisonings, ensure your patients will get the help they need right away if a poisoning occurs, and save them time and money by avoiding unnecessary use of EMS and emergency department services. Calling the poison center also provides you piece of mind that they are speaking to health care providers who are experts in managing poisonings or overdoses, allowing you to focus on patients who need your help most. See our website for more information: www.mdpoison.com.

