

Holiday Hazards

The Maryland Poison Center receives many calls about exposures to holiday decorations, plants, and other seasonal products. Here are some "holiday hazards" that health care professionals should be aware of:

Ornaments are made of glass, thin metal, styrofoam or wood and can break easily. Ingestions may cause cuts and esophageal obstructions. Very old ornaments or ornaments from other countries may contain lead.

The liquid in **bubble lights** is usually methylene chloride. Ingestions can result in lethargy, respiratory depression, changes in blood pressure and heart rate and GI upset may occur. Methylene chloride is partially metabolized to carbon monoxide; elevated carboxyhemoglobin levels may be noted.

Lamp oils and air fresheners contain hydrocarbons that can easily be aspirated by small children if ingested. Children experiencing significant coughing and choking must be evaluated in an emergency room for possible aspiration pneumonitis.

Most **snow globes** contain plastic or calcium carbonate in water; however, snow globes containing ethylene glycol (antifreeze) in concentrations as high as 20% have recently been discovered. Most have no ingredients listed on their labels.

Small children may have access to unattended and left over **alcoholic beverages**. Other sources of ethanol include **after shaves, mouthwashes, colognes and perfumes**. Ingestions can lead to inebriation, lethargy, coma and hypoglycemia in toddlers.

Contrary to popular belief, **poinsettias** do not cause toxicity other than mild dermal or gastrointestinal symptoms. **Holly berries** can cause nausea and vomiting if eaten in quantity. Most **mistletoe** in the United States is a variety that causes minimal effects (GI symptoms only).



The staff of the Maryland Poison Center wishes everyone a safe and happy holiday season!



DID YOU KNOW THAT... carbon monoxide poisonings often occur during power outages?

When the power goes out, alternative heat sources are often used to keep warm. Kerosene and gasoline space heaters, wood and propane stoves, grills and portable generators may produce high concentrations of carbon monoxide in the home if used indoors or not vented to the outdoors. Poisonings have also occurred when these devices are placed outside but close to windows or doors, or in garages. Fireplaces and furnaces may be sources of carbon monoxide if chimneys and flues are blocked. Carbon monoxide is colorless, odorless and produces symptoms that mimic the flu or food poisoning (headache, nausea, vomiting, fatigue). Patients are frequently unaware of exposures so it's important that health care providers recognize the sources and clinical effects of carbon monoxide.



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