

Poison Prevention Press

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Essential Oil Safety Tips

- Use products containing essential oils ONLY for their intended purpose.
 - ◇ Do not swallow a product unless the label says to do so.
 - ◇ Do not use a product on the skin unless the label says to do so.
 - ◇ Do not use a product as a pesticide unless the label says to do so.
- Use ONLY the amount stated on the label. Follow label directions exactly.
- Use and store household products where children (and pets) cannot see or reach them.

Did you know that...

- In 2013, the MPC managed over 350 cases involving an essential oil alone or a product containing an essential oil.
- In 2013, manufacturers of essential oils earned \$1 billion.



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Essential Oils

Essential oils are derived from plant parts. Because they have a scent, essential oils are often used in homemade and commercial perfumes, cosmetics, and room fresheners. Some are used, in minute amounts, in food preparations. Some are present in pesticides. Many essential oils have a long been used in medicines, too.

Many people think essential oils are harmless because they are natural and have been used for a long time. In some cases, that is simply not true. Many essential oils can cause rashes if used on the skin. Many can be poisonous if absorbed through the skin or swallowed. Few have been tested like medicines have, even though people put them in their mouths, on their skin, and in their children's vaporizers. Aspirating an essential oil can cause pneumonia; this can happen if someone tries to swallow it, but chokes so that a little goes into the lungs.

Since essential oils generally are not regulated, it can be hard to know exactly what is in the essential oil bottle – what species of plant, what concentration of active ingredient, or whether there are any contaminants.

Here's what is known about a few essential oils.

- **Peppermint** is used for gastrointestinal discomfort. It's important to choose the correct species of mint, as some types are poisonous; for example, pennyroyal oil is very poisonous to the liver.
- **Wintergreen** is used in some over-the-counter skin preparations to relieve pain. It creates a feeling of warmth because it causes blood vessels to enlarge. But oil of wintergreen is very dangerous if more than a tiny amount is swallowed. Oil of wintergreen is used as a food flavoring in trace amounts, but drinking from the bottle can be deadly. Swallowing oil of wintergreen is like swallowing a large number of adult aspirin.
- **Tea tree oil (also called melaleuca oil)** is used for some kinds of fungal skin infections. Swallowing as little as a mouthful or two can cause symptoms in children.
- **Nutmeg** is used in food but, when misused or abused, can cause hallucinations and coma.
- **Eucalyptus** is used for its soothing effects when inhaled, for example during a cold or cough. If swallowed, eucalyptus oil can cause seizures.
- **Sage oil** has been used as a scent, seasoning, and remedy. Swallowing more than a very small amount has caused seizures in children.
- **Camphor** is used as a moth repellent and as an ingredient in skin preparations. Even a small amount of camphor is dangerous if swallowed. Seizures can begin within only a few minutes. Camphor poisoning also occurred when skin preparations containing camphor were applied repeatedly on children – more frequently than the label recommended and/or covered up with extra clothing.

Safely using and storing essential oils is extremely important. If you have bottles of essential oils that you are not using, consider safely discarding them. Otherwise, they MUST be locked up, out of sight and reach of small children and pets at all times.

If someone swallows an essential oil, or a product containing essential oils, call the poison center immediately at 1-800-222-1222. A poison specialist will help you figure out if this could be dangerous and tell you exactly what to do. If a trip to the emergency room is needed, the poison specialist will provide treatment advice to the doctors and nurses.

Adapted with permission: The Poison Post

