

Iowa Poison Control Center – High School Curriculum Guide

This curriculum guide is intended as a flexible resource to support instruction. Teachers are encouraged to use the sections and materials that best meet the needs of their students and teaching goals.

Introduction

More than 55% of the reported poisonings to the Iowa Poison Control Center occur in kids and teenagers. That is over 13,000 calls every year, or 35 calls every single day just in Iowa. Young children are naturally curious and explore their world by eating, touching, and smelling things. Sometimes, these things can be poisonous. Also, most children cannot read labels and may eat, drink, or spray something that is harmful.

Teenagers, on the other hand, are more likely to experience poisonings related to experimentation, risky behaviors, or misuse of household products, medications, or substances. Education and awareness are key to helping both children and teens make safe choices and know what to do in a poisoning emergency.

Poison Information

What is a poison?

1. A poison is something that can make you sick or hurt you if you eat, drink, touch, or smell it.
2. Ways that poisons get in your body:
 - **Mouth:** swallowing a poison
 - **Nose:** breathing a poison
 - **Eyes:** getting a poison in the eyes
 - **Skin:** getting a poison on the skin, or from bites (spiders/snakes/etc.) and stings (bees/wasps/etc.).
3. Poisons are found everywhere — in your home and outside, too. Examples include:
 - **Bathroom:** shampoo, medicines, cleaning products
 - **Bedroom:** makeup, perfume

- **Kitchen:** soap, cleaning sprays, dishwasher pods
 - **Backyard:** plants, berries, mushrooms
 - **Garage:** gasoline, weed killers, windshield washer fluid
 - **Backpack:** medication, hand sanitizer
4. Poisons may look and smell nice, even though they can be harmful.
- Perfumes/colognes smell good but should never be tasted, ingested, or sprayed in the eyes.
 - Some medicines may taste good but taking too much can make you sick. For example, gummy vitamins.
 - Some poisons look like food or drinks. For example, cleaning products that look like juice.
5. Poisons can be found in many different forms:
- **Solids:** powders, pills, plants
 - **Liquids:** some are clear like water, some are colorful like juice
 - **Sprays:** aerosol cans, pump sprays
 - **Invisibles:** fumes, gases, carbon monoxide, car exhaust

Medication Safety

- **Always Take the Right Amount:** Only take the amount of medicine prescribed to you by a doctor. Taking more than that can make you very sick. For over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, read and follow dosage instructions.
- **The Right Kind:** Only take your own medicine. Taking someone else's medicine can be dangerous.
- **The Right Way:** Take your medicine exactly as prescribed, and don't give it to others. Read and understand the label.

Unintentional vs. Intentional Poisonings

Unintentional Poisonings

- Common in preschool and early school-age children.
- Caused by curiosity, imitation of adults, or accidental ingestion/touching.
- Typically occur at home.

Intentional Misuse

- More common in older children, tweens, teens, and adults.
- Misuse means using a product or medication improperly, often to get “high.”
- Commonly misused substances include:
 - Alcoholic beverages
 - Inhalants (sprays, correction fluids)
 - Cannabis and other drugs
 - ADHD medications
 - Over-the-counter cough or cold medicines
- Reasons include peer pressure, boredom, or trying to escape from problems.

The Iowa Poison Control Center

- The place to call if someone has been poisoned or if you have a question about poisons.
- Calls are answered 24 hours a day every day of the year.
- **Toll-free number: 1-800-222-1222** — connects callers to their nearest poison center. It does not matter where you live, you call the same number.
- The Iowa Poison Control Center serves the entire state of Iowa.
- Calls are ALWAYS private and free.
- Calls are answered by nurses and pharmacists trained in toxicology.
- Website: www.iowapoison.org
- An online chat feature is launching soon.

Poison Preventing Safety Tips

Here is what you can do to help prevent poisonings:

- Store poisons and medicines up high and out of reach of children. Put potentially dangerous products away immediately after use. Never leave them unattended.
- Keep the Poison Help number (1-800-222-1222) near every phone, on your refrigerator (magnet) and saved in your cell phone.
- Never call medicine “candy.” Children may copy what they see adults do.
- Keep products in their original containers. Do not store poisons in food or drink containers.
- Read and follow product labels carefully.

What to do if a Poisoning is Suspected:

- Stay calm!
- If someone is not breathing, unconscious, or having a seizure, call 911 immediately.
- For any other poison emergency, call the Iowa Poison Control Center: 1-800-222-1222 right away. Don't wait for symptoms to appear.
- If possible, have the product and product label nearby. Be ready to share the persons, age, weight, symptoms, and your phone number.
- The nurse or pharmacist will tell you exactly what do to next. They are there to help, not to get you in trouble.
- Remember, calls are private and free!

Learning Activity Ideas

Play “What If?”

Ask the students:

- What if you saw a 5-year-old playing with a spray bottle with an unknown liquid in it?
- What if you found a pill on the bathroom floor?
- What if you saw mushrooms growing on a tree in the park?
- What if someone offered you their prescription medication, or asked for yours?
- What if an online influencer challenged you to eat cleaning products?

Poison Collage

Have students cut pictures of potentially poisonous items from magazines and create a collage. Encourage discussion about how those items can be harmful.

Scavenger Hunt List

Have students make a list of possible poisons in their home (bathroom, kitchen, garage, etc.).

Practice Emergency Telephone Skills

- Remind students to **stay calm** and that the Poison Center is there to help.
- Review when to call **911** (if someone is not breathing, unconscious, or having a seizure).
- Review when to call **1-800-222-1222** for poison emergencies or questions.
- Remind students that the poison center helpers will ask:
 - The name of the product
 - The person’s name, age, and weight
 - The phone number and zip code
 - What symptoms the person has

Evaluation

At the end of the lesson, each student should be able to state:

- What a poison is.
- Three poison prevention/safety measures.
- The four ways poisons can get into the body.
- How to safely take medicine.
- The number to call for a poison question or emergency — **1-800-222-1222**.

Teachers: Please provide your feedback by scanning the QR Code below.

