

POISON PURSE ACTIVITY

Objective

The purpose of this activity is to increase the awareness and knowledge of parents/caregivers about the importance of preventing medication poisoning of young children.

Learner Outcome

To identify everyday items that are safe or are potentially poisonous to young children.

Background information

- An unintentional poisoning can occur when a child:
 - Eats or drinks something poisonous without meaning to take it
 - Is given too much medicine or the wrong medicine by mistake
 - Comes into contact with poison and it absorbs through the skin
 - Breathes in an airborne poison

- Medication can include prescription medication, vitamins, supplements, over-the-counter medication, and naturopathic remedies.

- **In Alberta, for the 5 out of 10** children, who visited a children's hospital to be treated for poisoning, the substance involved was a prescription medication or over-the-counter medications like acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®). (from Injury Prevention Centre 2025. Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program. Database. Public Health Agency of Canada.)

- During 2024, Alberta's poison centre, the Poison and Drug Information Service (PADIS), received over 25,500 calls concerning poisoning. 1 in 3 of those calls involved children 0 to 5 years old. (Alberta Health Services , Poison and Drug Information Service. Data received January 2025)

- If a child has been poisoned or taken improper medication, call Canada's toll-free 24/7 number for poison centres, **1-844-POISON-X (1-844-764-7669)**.

- Three key messages of the poisoning prevention campaign include:
 - Keep all medication locked up tight and out of sight
 - Keep visitors bags and coats out of reach
 - Take your medications where children can't see you

Program length: 20 minutes

Materials:

- Purse, bag or knapsack
- Any of the following potentially harmful items :
 - aspirin, acetaminophen, nail polish, nail polish remover, hand sanitizer, pepper spray, bear spray, cigar or cigarettes, chocolate laxatives, mouthwash, nose spray, e-Cigs or vapes, nicotine patches, prescription medication, asthma inhaler, lipstick, insect repellent, sunscreen, hairspray, perfume, hand cream, eye drops, ear drops, nose spray, vitamins or

other supplements, iron pills/pre-natal vitamins, toothpaste, batteries, toothpaste, baby powder,

- Any of the following safe items: tissue, bills, wallet, comb, brush, floss, brush
- Power point slide or poster of the Poison purse
- List of potentially poisonous everyday items and the harmful effect on a child if ingested (Attached)

Pre-Lesson Preparation

Collect a variety of items for the purse. Include some safe and potentially harmful items in the purse.

Learning strategies and activities

For your audience, **choose one of the following versions of this activity:**

1. Introduce the Poison Purse activity:

Presenter says: **What do you have in your purse or bag today?**

Encourage participants to show items from their purse/bag. Have individuals leave the items out of their bags.

Presenter says: **Some items we carry in our purse or bag can be harmful to young children. In 2023, 50% of children who went to a children's hospital because of the risk of poisoning, had taken prescription medication or over-the-counter medications like acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®).**

Presenter says: **As we go through the items on the table, we'll decide as a group if the item is safe for young children or possibly poisonous.**

As a group, label each of the items as safe or poisonous for young children. (Please see the List of potentially poisonous everyday items and the harmful effect on a child if ingested (Attached).

Use the Poison Purse for further examples to show the group.

2. Introduce the Poison Purse activity:

Show the Poison Purse to the group.

Presenter says: **In this bag, there are some items that many of us carry every day. Some of the items in this bag may be poisonous and harmful to young children. As I bring each item out of the bag, we'll decide as a group whether it is safe or possibly harmful to young children.**

Take one item out of the purse at a time to show to the group. Discuss if it is harmful or safe for young children. (Please see the List of potentially poisonous everyday items and the harmful effect on a child if ingested (Attached).

Presenter asks: **Is this item safe for young children or could it be harmful to them?**

Presenter says: **Who has something that may be harmful to your child/grandchild in your bag or purse?**

3. Show the poster or power point slide of the Poison Purse. Discuss the items that are poisonous to young children.

After using the Poison Purse, reinforce the concept that prevention of poisoning in young children is important. Use the three key messages:

- Keep all medication locked up tight and out of sight
- Keep visitors bags and coats out of reach
- Take your medications where children can't see you

Distribute the information brochures and/or posters.

Resources

- List of potentially poisonous everyday items and the harmful effect on a child if ingested (on next page)
- Injury Prevention Centre: <https://injurypreventioncentre.ca/injury-topics/poisoning/>
- Poison and Drug Information Service (PADIS):
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/page11975.aspx>

List of potentially poisonous everyday items and the harmful effect on a child if ingested

ITEM	SYMPTOMS
Hair Spray or Similar Product	May irritate eyes if aimed improperly.
Perfumes / Colognes	Contains alcohol so possibly feel drunk with large amounts swallowed; may irritate eyes if aimed improperly.
Nail Polish	May irritate eyes, skin and mouth, and stomach upset if swallowed.
Nail Polish Remover	May irritate eyes, skin and mouth, and stomach upset if swallowed
Prescription Medicines	May cause a wide variety of minor to serious problems, depending on product.
Over the Counter Medications	May cause agitation, jitters, sleepiness.
Nose Spray	May cause extreme sleepiness or agitation if swallowed.
Mouthwash	Often contains alcohol. May cause low blood sugar, sleepiness, impairment.
Toothpaste	May cause stomach upset if swallowed.
Baby Powder	May cause eye and throat irritation; if inhaled could cause serious breathing problems.
Pepper Spray	May irritate eyes, skin & cause breathing problems.
Insect Repellent	May irritate eyes and mouth; possible seizures if swallowed.
Eye Drops	May cause sleepiness, racing or slow heart rate (depending on ingredients) and difficulty breathing.
Hand Cream	May cause stomach upset and diarrhea if large amounts swallowed.
Chocolate Laxatives	May cause severe diarrhea.
Ink Pen	May cause eye and mouth irritation.
Batteries	May cause severe irritation or burns if chewed; also a choking hazard.
Cigarettes	May cause severe stomach upset, vomiting, choking and seizures.
Hand Sanitizer	Often contains alcohol. May cause low blood sugar, sleepiness, impairment.
Over-the-counter Pain Medication	May cause sleepiness, nausea, vomiting and affects breathing.

Non-poisonous items for inclusion in the purse could include: cell phone, band aids, facial tissues, wallet, comb, brush, toothbrush, reusable bag, and notepad.