



# Head Start Staff: What You Need to Know About Pesticide Poisoning

They buzz, they burrow, they crawl, they sting, they bite, they munch, and they torment. From insects to rodents, they can make our lives difficult. Pests, such as ants, cockroaches, mice, rats, and termites, can be particularly troublesome to families if left unchecked. However, many families are unaware of the serious health risks associated with the improper storage or use of household pesticides, the products we use to control or kill pest populations in and around a home.

We encourage Head Start staff to teach families about the possible health effects pesticides can have on young children as well as the simple pesticide poisoning prevention efforts that they can incorporate into their regular household activities. In this way, families are armed with important safety knowledge that lets them make smart choices that effectively protect their children.

One of the simplest and most effective methods of preventing pesticide poisoning is storing household pesticides out of reach of small children in high, locked cabinets.

## Pesticides. What are they?

Pesticides are products used in and around the home to control insects (insecticides), termites (termiteicides), rodents (rodenticides), fungi (fungicides), weeds (herbicides), and

microbes (disinfectants). They can be sold in the form of sprays, powders, crystals, or balls. Since most pesticides are specifically created to be poisonous to pest populations, there are many potential risks associated with their improper use.

## How do children come in contact with pesticides?

Children can come into contact with pesticides stored or applied in their homes, yards, day-care facilities, schools, parks, or on pets.

Children often touch things (that may be contaminated with a pesticide) and put their hands in their mouths. They also crawl and play on floors, grass, or in spaces that might be contaminated with pesticides. These activities may put them at higher risks for poisoning. Exposure to pesticides may cause serious damage to a child's health.

## What are the symptoms of pesticide poisoning?

Pesticide poisoning symptoms may appear similar to the flu. If a child is experiencing any of the following symptoms listed below, contact your Poison Control Center immediately.

## IMPORTANT FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

- The American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) data show that more than 50 percent of the two million poisoning incidents each year involve children younger than six years old.
- Each year, poison centers receive thousands of calls from the public with concerns about potential exposure to common household pesticides.
- Over 90 percent of calls to the poison control centers concern poisonings that occur in the home.
- Among households with children under the age of five, close to half stored at least one pesticide product within reach of a child.
- Nearly 75 percent of households with no children under the age of five stored pesticides in an unlocked cabinet within a child's reach—a significant figure since 13 percent of all pesticide poisonings occur in homes other than that of the child.

Play It Safe

## Immediate short-term effects include:

- Headaches,
- Dizziness,
- Muscle twitching,
- Weakness,
- Tingling sensations, and
- Nausea.

## How can pesticide poisoning affect a child's health?

Pesticide poisoning is especially harmful to children since their brain and nervous systems are at the early, critical stages of development. The effects are not always immediate, and may show up years later as unknown illnesses. Because their bodies are still growing, children have less natural defenses and can develop serious health effects if overexposed to pesticides.

## Long-term exposure to pesticides may cause serious health effects such as:

- Birth defects;
- Learning disabilities;
- Behavioral changes;
- Organ damage;
- Forms of cancer, including leukemia, breast cancer, and brain tumors; or
- Asthma symptoms.

## Where are pesticides commonly found?

Bathrooms and kitchens are the most likely areas of the home to contain improperly stored pesticides.

## Common household pesticides in these areas are:

- Roach sprays and baits;
- Bath and kitchen disinfectants and sanitizers, including bleach;
- Rat and other rodent poisons;
- Insect repellents;
- Products used to kill mold or mildew; and
- Flea and tick shampoos, powders, and dips for pets.

## Other household pesticides include:

- Swimming pool chemicals and
- Weed killers.

## How can pesticide poisoning be prevented?

Curiosity is a normal stage of a child's developmental process. These explorers are at greater risk for accidental poisoning.

## By practicing the following pesticide poisoning prevention guidelines, innocent mistakes don't have to turn into tragedies:

- Always store pesticides away from children's reach, in a locked cabinet.
- Install safety latches on cabinets.
- Read the label first. Follow the directions exactly as they are written on the label.
- Remove children, pets, and their toys before applying pesticides (inside or outside).
- Re-close a pesticide product if ever interrupted during application (e.g., phone call, doorbell, etc.).
- Store pesticides in their original containers since a child can mistake another container for food or drink.
- Use child-resistant packaging correctly by tightly sealing the container after every use.
- Teach children that "pesticides are poisons" and not to be touched.
- Program or post the Poison Control Centers' national hotline number, 1-800-222-1222, in or near your phone.

