

## Danger at home lurks in pills, plants, chemicals and more

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Parents urged to think like a kid to effectively safety-proof their home.

(HealthDay) -- If you have children or pets, you've probably looked around your house to see what potential hazards you need to lock up or move, like the cleaning products under the sink. But it's easy to overlook something a child might find appealing.

That windshield washer fluid in the garage might look like a big jug of blue [fruit drink](#) to a child. Medication that's red and round can look a lot like a candy to a youngster.

No home can be 100 percent safe, but you can take steps to protect your family from the most serious threats in your home.

"You have to anticipate what kids might do," said Rose Ann Soloway, a clinical toxicologist with the National Capital Poison Center in Washington, D.C. "They're smart and fast, and they like to imitate us."

"I compare children getting into medicines and poisons to a young child rolling over for the first time and falling off a bed or couch," Soloway said. "How often do you hear parents say, 'I didn't know he could do that' when a child rolls over for the first time? While it's not possible to be with a child 24 hours a day, it's important that the things that can really hurt them have as many barriers as possible. Keep anything dangerous locked up and out of reach. Children rely on us to provide a safe environment."

So what are the biggest problems that could be lurking in your home?

"The most dangerous are probably medications," said Dr. Jennifer Lowry, a [medical](#) toxicologist at Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics in Kansas City. "Parents don't always put them away. [Grandparents](#) don't always remember that they could be an issue. Their medications may be in [pill boxes](#) that are easy to open. And, older adults are on more medications that can be toxic to children."

Soloway said that the medications of greatest concern when taken by those who don't need them are [blood pressure](#) and heart medications, as well as narcotic medications to relieve pain. It's also not always children who are an issue with medications. Poison control centers get lots of calls from [older adults](#) who've mixed up their medications.

But even pills people might think are safe can be an issue if the dose is large enough.

"Everything can be a poison depending on the dose," said Lowry. People might not be concerned about leaving vitamins accessible, but iron can be extremely toxic, she noted.

Soloway said that personal care products also prompt a lot of calls to poison control centers. "The ones we worry about are those with alcohol

in them," she said. "Children can get alcohol poisoning from mouthwash. Children see adults putting it in their mouths, so why wouldn't they? But, they don't get the swish-and-spit part."

Then there are pesticides, which can be dangerous if they're swallowed, breathed in or gotten on the skin. "It's so important to understand that these products are intended to kill an organism," Soloway noted.

Products called hydrocarbons, such as gasoline, kerosene, lighter fluid and lamp oil, are also a concern. Though they generally pass through the digestive system without causing too much damage, they can get into the lungs, causing a serious condition called aspiration pneumonia, if a child swallows one of the products and then vomits it up.

Immediate harm can come from products that can cause chemical burns on contact, including drain openers, toilet bowl cleaners and dishwasher detergent.

But preventing poisonings at home really boils down to common sense, Lowry said. Store [cleaning products](#) and other chemicals in their original containers and store them on a high shelf. The same goes for medications -- or, even better, keep them in a locked box. Replace childproof caps tightly after you use a medication.

If you have to use a pesticide or a cleaning product, use them in well-ventilated areas and follow the label instructions. "If a warning is there, pay attention to it," advised Soloway. She also recommended using just the amount of product that you need.

People who have plants in their homes need to know exactly what they are, as some can be irritating and others safe, Lowry said. And without knowing the kind of plant, it's difficult for poison control to help.

She also suggested getting down on your hands and knees and crawling around your house to get the same view your child might have. "That's when you'll see grandma's heart medicine that fell under the couch," Lowry said.

If the worst happens and you or a child has come into contact with a poisonous substance or ingested it, the first thing to do is to call 1-800-222-1222. That's a nationwide number that will link you to a poison control center, which has experts who can judge whether the situation can be handled at home or whether an ER visit is needed.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more tips on [preventing poisoning](#).

For more on the risks of poisonings at home, read a companion article on [one woman's story](#).

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