

# Poison Centers benefit patients, reduce medical costs, study finds

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Patients who received help from a poison center had shorter hospital stays and lower hospital charges among those who are the most expensive to treat, according to a study led by researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health.

Poison centers provide 24-hour assistance year round to the public and to medical professionals. While studies show that poison centers reduce system-wide costs, their impact on patient outcomes at the [hospital](#) level has not been clear, the study's authors report.

The researchers conducted a retrospective analysis of inpatients treated in Illinois hospitals in 2010. They linked data from the Illinois Poison Center to medical record data from the Illinois Hospital Association and controlled for patient- and facility-level variables.

Nearly 10,000 hospitalized [patients](#) treated for poison exposure were included in the study, and half received poison center assistance during the course of their treatment.

"We found that if the poison center was involved in patients' care there was a cumulative decrease of \$2,078 in hospital charges per 10 patients," said Lee Friedman, assistant professor of environmental and occupational health sciences at UIC and lead author of the study, which was published in the March issue of *Clinical Toxicology*.

Hospital emergency rooms that placed calls to the Illinois Poison Center

saved \$2.1 million for the 10,272 patients they admitted for care in 2010, the researchers estimate. Had all 166,949 patients who were admitted to Illinois hospitals due to poisoning received assistance from a poison center, a potential savings of \$34.6 million may have been realized.

The study also found the length of stay among poison center assisted patients was .058 days shorter, after adjusting for multiple variables.

Poison centers across the nation are not securely funded and often must depend on a combination of local discretionary support and donations, despite numerous studies showing that they provide system-wide savings by preventing poisonings, reducing unnecessary hospital visits and, as shown in this study, reducing cost of hospitalizations. Many poison centers have been closed or forced to reduce services due to budget cutbacks. It is estimated that only half of the U.S. population has access to a certified regional poison center, and Illinois' poison center is slated to close in June if funding is not secured.

"This study shows that hospitals, insurance companies, and government benefit financially from poison centers," said Friedman, "and an equitable system of cost sharing should be developed to ensure that poison centers can continue to provide services to the community."

Provided by University of Illinois at Chicago

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