

# Poisonings in Children 5 Years & Under



## What is a Poison?

A poison is anything that can make you sick if you swallow it, taste it, smell it, get it on your skin, or get it in your eye. It can be a drug or a non-drug substance.

## The Impact of Poisonings in Atlantic Canada

- Each year in Atlantic Canada, poisonings in children aged 0-4 years old cost Atlantic Canadians \$1.87 Million. 88% of all poisonings in children under the age of 14 years are from children 0-4 years old.
- In 2022, the Atlantic Canada Poison Centre handled 5821 calls from the public. 37% of these calls were for children 5 years old and under.

## Why are Children 5 years old and younger at risk for poisonings? \*

- As they become more mobile, young children like to explore the world by putting things in their mouths.
- A child's skin is much thinner than an adult's, so substances can be much more easily absorbed when exposed on the skin.
- Children are physically smaller than adults so even a small amount of a toxic product can have a greater effect, more quickly. For example, one pill can be very dangerous (or even fatal) if swallowed by a child.
- Children like to watch and copy adults. They see their caregivers handling medicines and household cleaning products and want to do the same.

\* Parachute: Poison Evidence Summary

## Tips to help protect children of all ages from poisonings at home

- Be aware of all toxic products in your home that could be a poison risk, and make sure that they are all stored in safe places out of sight and reach of children.
- Keep all poisons in original containers. Put the caps on tightly after use.
- Never store non-food toxic products in old food containers, or in places where food would normally be (like the fridge).
- Keep all medicines, alcohol and cannabis products in a locked container or locked cabinet out of reach and sight of children.
- Ask visitors to keep purses and bags high up and away from children.
- Take medicine when children are not looking (Children naturally want to imitate adults).
- Do not rely on "child proof" or "child resistant" packaging alone. Children as young as 2 have been able to open these containers and access the contents.
- Be aware of the health risks of lead that can sometimes be present in paint and toys: visit [Loving Care: Parents and Families](#) for more information, NS Dept. of Health and Wellness.
- Keep the Atlantic Canada Poison Centre number in your phone and on your fridge.
- Visit <https://www.childsafetylink.ca/poison-prevention> for more information and resources on preventing childhood poisonings at home.

## Top 5 calls for children under 5 to the Atlantic Canada Poison Centre

1. Pain relief medication (e.g., acetaminophen and ibuprofen liquid, tablets)
2. Cleaning Substances (e.g., laundry pods, dishwasher tablets)
3. Cosmetics / Personal Care Products (e.g., hand sanitizer, nail polish, sunscreen)
4. Household Items (e.g., button batteries, glow sticks, silica gel, magnets, slime)
5. Dietary Supplements / Herbals / Homeopathic (e.g., melatonin, multi-vitamins)

## About the Atlantic Canada Poison Centre

The Atlantic Canada Poison Centre offers free, confidential advice for people of all ages in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland & Labrador and New Brunswick (healthcare professionals only). The phone line is open 24/7 and is staffed by Specialists in Poison Information (incl. nurses, pharmacists, and medical toxicologists) who are trained experts in this field.

## Why contact the Atlantic Canada Poison Centre?

When you call the poison centre's phone line, their trained staff will help you determine if you need to take your child to the emergency department or if you can manage symptoms at home. In 2022, for children 5 years old and under, 93% of the calls were managed at home versus going to the hospital.

## When to call the Atlantic Canada Poison Centre:



**Call 911 if child is not breathing or is unconscious.**

If you know or suspect that your child has been in contact with a poison, call the Atlantic Canada Poison Centre immediately at

**1-844-POISON-X (1-844-764-7669).**



[www.atlanticcanadapoisoncentre.ca](http://www.atlanticcanadapoisoncentre.ca)



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