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Celebrate Independence Day with Safety

Illinois Poison Center Provides Poison Prevention Advice

(Chicago) – Fourth of July is a joyous occasion filled with fireworks, food and fun but experts at the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) are urging safety during your holiday festivities. Unexpected everyday items can turn into poisoning hazards threatening you and your family’s health.

“During holiday gatherings normal routines are interrupted creating the perfect opportunity for a poisoning to occur,” said Dr. Michael Wahl, Medical Director, Illinois Poison Center. “Common products, and even food, can be a poisoning risk if proper precautions are not taken.”

Common Poisoning Hazard: Glow sticks

Glow sticks are one of the products that generate the most calls to the IPC during the Fourth of July holiday. The IPC received more than 734 calls regarding glow sticks in 2008 alone. The liquid contained inside the tube is generally considered non-toxic. However, it can be a skin, eye and stomach irritant, and the liquid can cause irritation, swelling and pain around the mouth. Ingestions of the liquid can result in persistent nausea and vomiting.

“Young children put all sorts of things in their mouths, and these products are no exception. Parents should close watch on their children to make sure that the glow sticks do not leak,” said Dr. Wahl. “If the fluid gets on the skin, immediately wash the affected area with soap and water.”

Dangerous Hydrocarbons: Lighter fluid

Barbeques are a fourth of July staple but dangers lurk in the form of lighter fluid. This toxic liquid is considered a hydrocarbon, and when breathed in can lead to serious respiratory problems. In the most serious cases, this type of poisoning could result in death, based on a number of factors involving how an individual’s body processes the fluids.

Fireworks Pose Poisoning Risk

Fireworks, which are illegal in Illinois except at professional displays, pose more than just a burn risks. They are considered extremely toxic if ingested. Some fireworks contain nitrates and chlorates, this can impair the body's ability to carry oxygen in the blood. Fireworks also can contain barium salts, which can trigger seizures.

Use Common Sense to Ensure Food Safety

Alcohol- and food-related poisonings are commonplace during holiday festivities. Unfinished alcoholic beverages are of particular risk to children and can be very dangerous, even fatal, to small children as alcohol can cause low blood sugar. IPC experts remind parents to place alcoholic beverages out of the reach of children. Symptoms of an alcohol overdose may be mild, such as stimulation, dizziness and nausea, or they may progress to more serious complications, such as vomiting, drowsiness, difficulty breathing, coma and even death.

Food poisoning, a common occurrence during this typically warm-weather holiday, is caused by bacteria, which grows in certain foods, such as mayonnaise-containing products, when they are not handled, cooked or stored properly. Symptoms of the most common types of food poisoning may include nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhea and fever. One or more of these symptoms usually develop within a few hours to a few days after eating the contaminated food.

To stay safe, the Illinois Poison Center recommends the following tips:

- Store hot foods in insulated containers so they stay hot.
- Pack refrigerated foods just before leaving home; use well-insulated coolers that allow space for ice.
- If grilling, pack additional clean plates to avoid cross-contamination of raw and cooked foods.
- Cook foods as close to serving time as possible to limit bacterial growth.
- Refrigerate food within two hours after cooking.

If you suspect a poisoning don't wait for symptoms to appear, call the Illinois Poison Center right away at 1-800-222-1222.

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