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How to Avoid the Emergency Room this Fourth of July

(Chicago) – Independence Day brings food, fun and fireworks. It also brings thousands of people to hospitals each year. The Illinois Poison Center (IPC) encourages you to be safe and prevent poisonings at your holiday celebration with a few helpful reminders.

Watch What You Eat

Food poisonings, as well as alcohol poisonings, are commonplace during holiday festivities. Food poisoning is caused by bacteria that grow on certain foods when they are not handled, stored or cooked properly. Symptoms of food poisoning include diarrhea, vomiting, stomach cramps and fever which can develop within hours or a few days after consuming contaminated food. To prevent food poisoning always remember to:

- Store foods in insulated containers to keep them hot/ cool.
- Cook foods as close to serving time as possible to limit bacterial growth.
- Refrigerate food within two hours after cooking.

The IPC reminds parents to place alcoholic beverages out of the reach of children and to immediately dispose of all unfinished alcoholic beverages if children are present. Alcohol can cause low blood sugar and can be fatal to small children and adults. 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.

Be Careful at the Barbeque

Lighter fluid, lamp oil and torch fluid can cause serious injury when inhaled into the lungs. These products are hydrocarbons which can lead to serious respiratory problems when breathed in. Depending on how an individual's body processes these fluids, hydrocarbon poisonings could affect the heart, brain, kidneys, bone marrow and can even result in death. After breathing in hydrocarbons an individual will usually cough and choke and may experience a burning sensation

in the stomach which can cause vomiting. If a person's lungs are affected they may continue to cough severely, begin to breathe rapidly and the skin may become bluish due to low levels of oxygen in the blood.

Fireworks Can Be Poisonous Too

Fireworks, which are illegal in Illinois except at professional displays, pose both burn and poisoning risks. Fireworks may be extremely toxic if ingested. Some fireworks contain nitrates and chlorates. These can impair the body's ability to carry oxygen in the blood. Another toxic ingredient in fireworks is barium salts, which can cause vomiting, tremors, seizures, paralysis and heart problems.

Glow Sticks are a Common Poisoning Hazard

The liquid contained inside a glow stick is usually considered to be non-toxic. It can, however, irritate the skin, stomach and eyes and can cause some swelling and pain around the mouth. Ingesting this liquid may cause an individual to experience persistent nausea and vomiting. Throw away leaking glow sticks and be sure to wash your hands after handling a broken glow stick.

If you suspect a poisoning call the Illinois Poison Center's 24-hour hotline, 1-800-222-1222

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The Illinois Poison Center serves all of Illinois – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – via a national, toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222. Staffed by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and poison information providers, the IPC provides poison prevention information and treatment advice on household products, medication issues, alcohol and drug misuse, bites and stings and other poisonings.

The IPC is a program of the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, an association comprising more than 140 hospitals and health care organizations working together to improve the delivery of health care services in the Chicago area.

Editor's Note: Illinois Poison Center experts are available for media interviews. Please contact Elizabeth Leonard at 312-906-6142 or eleonard@mchc.com to schedule an interview.