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Common Holiday Decorations Pose Safety Hazards *Illinois Poison Center Urges Public to Use Caution*

(Chicago) – The Illinois Poison Center (IPC) advises parents and caregivers to take extra safety precautions this holiday season in order to avoid a potential poisoning. Many of the calls received by the Illinois Poison Center involved the ingestion of objects not intended for consumption, such as buttons, toys, ornaments and plants.

“Common decorative and other holiday items pose potential safety risks to children,” said Michael Wahl, managing medical director, IPC. “When daily household routines become disrupted, as is common during the holidays, the IPC sees a rise in calls regarding accidental poisonings.”

Among the items that cause the most concern to poison center experts include these common holiday decorations, seasonal items and plants associated with the holidays, such as azalea and mistletoe. The IPC encourages families to use extreme caution when decorating with, or using these potentially dangerous substances.

Holiday Decorations

- **Angel hair**, which is commonly used to decorate Christmas trees, consists of spun glass, which can penetrate the eyes and mouth upon contact, causing severe irritation and pain. Although the glass fragments can be removed from the skin by rubbing clay or a fresh ball of bread over the exposed area, it is best to avoid using this decorative item.
- **Christmas tree ornaments** have the potential to cut or block airway passages if they are swallowed. Often, ornaments are made from food products; be aware of children who may try to eat such ornaments.
- **Snow globes** are glass or plastic domes filled with water that reveal a winter “snow” scene when shaken. The snow is made from a non-toxic chalk-like or plastic substance. However, the fluid contained in the globe could become contaminated with harmful bacteria over time and cause vomiting and diarrhea when ingested if the globe shatters.
- **Snow spray** used to decorate windows, mirrors and trees can cause eye damage if sprayed directly into the eye from a pressurized container. Follow the warning labels on the container to avoid dangerous mishaps.

Holiday Hazards - Seasonal Items

- **Solid wax candles** are considered non-toxic; however, they present a potential choking hazard and could obstruct bowel movements if swallowed.

• **Glass candle lamps** contain liquid fuels composed of hydrocarbons. When products containing hydrocarbons enter the lungs, severe respiratory problems, which can lead to death, may develop. All hydrocarbon-containing products are very dangerous and should be kept out of children's reach.

• **Fireplace powders and logs** that burn different colors contain heavy metals, such as lead, copper, barium and selenium. Ingestion of such metals can cause intense stomach and intestinal upset. Serious symptoms will result from ingestion of large amounts of the powder or log material.

Plants

Evergreens, such as balsams, cedar, fir, juniper and pine, possess toxic oils. Exposure to large amounts of the oil could cause stomach irritation and other negative reactions. Though **essential oils** from these plants are often sold as aromatic fragrances, even a small droplet of the oils in their pure form can damage the lungs if inhaled.

Many **holiday plants** can be toxic if ingested, causing symptoms such as nausea and vomiting or more serious conditions such as cardiac problems and seizures. Several plants you may want to avoid having in your home, and the dangers associated with them, include:

- mistletoe – nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, drowsiness, blood pressure changes, hallucinations and seizures
- azalea and rhododendron – nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cardiac affects and seizures
- amaryllis, Christmas berry, holly, and winter broom – nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- Jerusalem cherry – headache, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- Christmas pepper – burning sensation
- chrysanthemum – skin rash
- Contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are not toxic. However, do not allow any children or pets to consume large amounts of any plant.

If a poisoning or suspected poisoning occurs, the IPC urges individuals to contact the poison control center immediately at 1-800-222-1222 for treatment recommendations; do not wait for symptoms to appear.

For more information on holiday hazards, or for additional safety tips, Illinois residents can call the IPC at 1-800-222-1222, or visit the IPC Web site at www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org.

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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.