

For Immediate Release

Contact:
Autumn Allen
1-800-222-1222

Mr. Yuk isn't just for the grandkids anymore

He's green and scowling and a tool used by many Washington parents to help warn their children away from the dangers of poisons. Mr. Yuk has been a part of the culture of Washington state since 1974, but not enough people know the poison hotline phone number, **1-800-222-1222**, is on each Mr. Yuk sticker. It's not just for kids. It's for everyone -- especially for older adults.

March 16-22, 2008 is National Poison Prevention Week and although a lot of emphasis is on preventing poisonings in children, the Washington Poison Center (WAPC) wants all adults to know that it can be a lifesaving resource for them, too.

Senior citizens consume most of the medications prescribed in the United States, often taking multiple prescription and non-prescription medications, 5-15 on average. They often have increased sensitivity to the side effects of medications, as well. Thus, seniors are at significant risk of poisoning from accidental drug overdose, drug reactions and drug interactions. "Many seniors have failing eye sight, memory lapses and medical problems that are undiagnosed or poorly treated," said Dr. William T. Hurley, Medical Director of the Washington Poison Center. "They are frequently hospitalized due to drug reactions and drug interactions."

Children visiting a senior citizen are a welcome and happy sight, but can be at risk due to their own curiosity and the availability of dangerous medications often not kept in child-resistant containers. Senior citizens represent a special high-risk group for poisoning, but all too often do not call the Poison Center for help. With senior citizens making up 11.5% of the population of the state of Washington, they were involved in only 7.6% of the calls to the Washington Poison Center.

Anyone can call the Poison Center about taking too much of a medication, taking the wrong medication or taking multiple medications that may negatively interact together. The WAPC has a useful fact sheet, *The 5 Rights of Medicine Safety*, which advises to call the Poison Center if one of the five rights is "a wrong," available online at www.wapc.org or by calling **1-800-222-1222**.

Despite efforts to inform the public, it seems to be a “hidden fact” that the WAPC is staffed by pharmacists, nurses and other medical professionals that are specially-trained in poison information. Nearly 17% of calls received by the Poison Center are from other medical professionals including other nurses, pharmacists, paramedics, emergency department physicians and veterinarians. With 24/7 access to a physician toxicologist and a database containing information on millions of drugs, chemicals and toxins, the WAPC staff has the expertise to help treat and prevent a poisoning for people and for animals of all ages.

All calls to the Poison Center are free and confidential. Services are available for non-English speakers and for the deaf and hearing impaired.

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About National Poison Prevention Week

Congress established National Poison Prevention Week more than forty years ago to raise awareness of unintentional poisonings. Over one million poisonings involving children are reported each year. Many of these poisonings could have been prevented. Poison centers organize events during this special week to educate parents and others about which household products are poisonous, how to prevent poisonings from occurring and what to do if a poisoning occurs.

About the Washington Poison Center

The Washington Poison Center, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization, prevents harm from poisonings by being the primary resource for poison treatment, education and prevention. Reachable 24/7, the national poison hotline: **1-800-222-1222** will connect you to specially-trained nurses, pharmacists and poison specialists. Poison help is always free and confidential. Services are available for people with hearing problems and for non-English speakers.