

PRESS RELEASE

Questions? Contact the Washington Poison Center 24/7/365 at 1 (800) 222-1222.
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Washington Poison Center notes increase in poison exposures during the COVID-19 pandemic

Seattle, WA – The Washington Poison Center (WAPC) urges people to be cautious with cleaning products during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to WAPC data, the number of exposures to household cleaning products (bleach, soaps, detergents, and antiseptics) increased by 23% from the number of exposures reported at this time in 2019. Many household cleaning product exposures are related to COVID-19 transmission concerns and precautions.

“It is important that people follow good hand hygiene and disinfecting practices in households and businesses. However, it is also important to read labels carefully, follow instructions, and only use substances for their intended use,” says Dr. Erica Liebelt, WAPC Medical Director. “We are seeing adverse and toxic effects in people of all ages. These exposures are preventable with simple strategies.”

Examples of exposures being reported to the WAPC include:

- Mixing cleaning chemicals together, which can inadvertently produce a toxic gas.
- Using bleach and hydrogen peroxide to wash hands and faces, resulting in allergic reactions and skin rashes.
- Using chemicals to wash and “disinfect” groceries and fresh produce.
- Directly applying bleach and other chemicals to disinfect homemade masks, resulting in inhalation of toxic gases.
- Young children getting in to cleaning products left open and unattended.

WAPC’s increase in exposures parallels a nationwide trend. When comparing calls during the first quarter of 2020 to that of 2019, poison centers in the United States noted a 20% increase in calls about cleaners—see more in the [CDC’s MMWR](#).

To prevent poisoning, the WAPC recommends the following strategies:

- Wear gloves and open windows and doors for ventilation when cleaning.
- Do not mix cleaning products, as mixing can create hazardous gases.
- Do not use cleaning products on food.
- Store cleaners, household chemicals, and other potentially harmful substances in their original containers. Keep these products up high and out of reach of children.
- Supervise children when using hand sanitizer, as ingestion could lead to alcohol poisoning. Store hand sanitizers up high and out of reach of children.
- Call the Poison Helpline (1-800-222-1222) for help with any questions or poison emergencies.

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The Washington Poison Center has assisted Washingtonians for over 60 years through its toll-free Poison Helpline (1-800-222-1222), available 24/7/365. Staffed by nurses and pharmacists with expert-level training in toxicology, the Poison Helpline provides free, confidential, and immediate information and treatment advice on poisonings, drug overdoses, and toxic exposures.