

Poison Control

News

Helpful Information & Safety Hints from the New England Regional Poison Control Centers

Summer 2004

The Poison Control News is an informative quarterly newsletter produced in collaboration by the four New England Regional Poison Control Centers. Working together through a grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration, this newsletter focuses on topics such as seasonal poison prevention tips, access to poison centers and understanding the risks and avoidance of environmental poisons.

If you have any poisoning questions or concerns, call your poison center using the national toll-free number 1-800-222-1222. You will be connected to your designated poison center: Connecticut Poison Control Center, Massachusetts/Rhode Island Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention, New Hampshire Poison Information Center, and Northern New England Poison Center (Maine and Vermont).

Spotlight on.....

By: Rebecca Miller, RN,
Northern New England Poison
Center

The environment contains many poisons. Some are heavy metals. Lead and mercury are two common ones.

Mercury

Lakes, ponds and rivers in many states, as well as the ocean, contain mercury. Coal fired generating plants release mercury into the air. It then settles in the water. Bacteria convert the toxin to a chemical called methylmercury. Fish absorb the mercury. Fish that eat other fish may have the highest levels of mercury. Fish that contain mercury look,

Limit the Mercury & Lead in Your Life

smell and taste fine.

Mercury poisoning is more of a concern for pregnant or nursing women, women who may become pregnant and young children. Small amounts of mercury can harm the brain and nervous system of infants and young children. This can cause problems with learning and behavior. It takes larger amounts of mercury to harm adults and older children. Numbness in the hands and feet, and changes in eyesight may occur.

General guidelines for pregnant or nursing women, women who may become pregnant, and young children:

- Do not eat: shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish
- Eat 2 meals a week or less: shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, catfish
- Eat 1 meal a week or less: albacore ("white") tuna
- Variable: fresh water fish (check state fish advisory)

General guidelines for others:

- Eat 2 meals per month:

shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish

- No limit: shrimp, canned white or light tuna, salmon, pollock, catfish

- Variable: fresh water fish (check state fish advisory)

Call the poison control center or health department for your state's guidelines for eating fish, especially fresh water fish.

Websites for the New England Fish Advisories:

Connecticut:

<http://www.dph.state.ct.us/BC/H/EEOH/webfish.htm>

Maine:

<http://www.maine.gov/dhs/ehu/fish/>

Massachusetts:

<http://www.mass.gov/dph/beha/>

[fishlist.htm](#)

New Hampshire: <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/DHHS/HLTHRISKASSESS/LIBRARY/Fact+Sheet/mercury-facts.htm>

Rhode Island:

<http://www.healthri.org/environment/risk/fish.htm>

Vermont:

<http://www.state.vt.us/health/fish.htm>

Lead

Lead is common in the environment. Paint chips or dust, soil and drinking water may contain lead. Lead poisoning is a more serious concern for pregnant women and children.

Paint chips that contain lead can cause poisoning if eaten.

As this paint ages, it may peel,

flake or create a fine dust.

This dust settles on the floor or window sills. Young children who crawl on the floor and put their hands or toys in their mouth may get lead into their bodies. Lead was removed from paint in 1978. If your home, daycare, workplace, or school is older than that, ask if the lead paint was removed or painted over to prevent peeling. Do not renovate a house with lead paint before talking to lead removal experts. You need to protect yourself and family.

Some jobs or hobbies can be other sources of lead exposure. People working at jobs such as battery manufacturing, radiator repair, shooting range operations or stain glass workers

SPANISH TRANSLATION

Limite el Mercurio y Plomo en Su Vida

By: *Vilma Rodrigues, Rhode Island & Massachusetts Poison Center*

El metilo de mercurio esta presente en mucho de los lagos, rios, y quebradas que se encuentran en muchos de los estados de la nación. También se encuentra en el mar. Mercurio es descargado en el aire por compañías que usan carbón como su recurso de energía. Luego ésta toxina se acumula en nuestros lagos, rios, al igual en que nuestros mares. Bacteria convierten la toxina, mercurio, en un químico que se llama metilo de mercurio. Este tipo de mercurio se encuentra en el pescado. El pescado que contiene metilo de mercurio huele bien y tiene un sabor normal y no demuestra rasgos del mercurio.

El metilo de mercurio es un veneno que presenta un peligro a las mujeres que estan en estado de embarazo o que planean estarlo, al igual a mujeres que lactan sus bebes, al igual que al bebe. También presenta un peligro para los niños de menor edad. Pequeñas cantidades de metilo de mercurio pueden causar daño al cerebro y al sistema nervioso que a su vez pueden dar paso a problemas de aprendizaje y comportamiento. Se necesitan grandes cantidades de metilo de mercurio para que se afecten a los adultos. Falta de sensación en las manos y pies, cambios en la función mental al igual que en la vista pueden ser resultas del envenenamiento.

Medidas en general para la mujer embarazada o con planes de embarazo y para niños:

- No consuma: tiburón o pez sierra
- Consuma dos veces a la semana o menos: tuna (no blanca) enlatada, camarones, salmón, bacalao, o pescado de gato.
- Consuma la tuna blanca solamente una vez a la semana o menos

are at higher risk for contaminating the home from dirty work clothes. Leave contaminated work clothes at work or remove them before going into the house and wash separately from others.

Pipes, solder and fixtures can contaminate tap water. Old lead pipes in the home, or the solder that connects the pipes may contain lead. When water sits in the pipes for several hours, lead can leach into it. Lead has no smell or taste. Test your water for lead if the pipes are old. Current guidelines from the EPA advise not to exceed 15 parts per billion (ppb) of lead in tap water. Some states recommend lower levels. Using cold water and running water for one to sever-

al minutes reduces the amount of lead. Pregnant women and children should not drink water that contains more than 15 ppb of lead, less in some states. Human skin does not absorb lead. Therefore, bathing is safe.

Lead is most harmful to small children and pregnant woman. Stomachaches, headaches, anemia, and irritability may occur. Children exposed to lead may have learning and behavior problems. In severe cases permanent brain and kidney damage can occur.

Discuss lead testing with your pediatrician on or before your child's first birthday. The only way to measure the

amount of lead in your child's blood is to get a lead blood test. Children who live in or regularly visit a home built before 1978, and recently remodeled, are at risk for lead poisoning. Children who live in or regularly visit a home built before 1950 are at risk. Those with a sibling or playmate who has lead poisoning are also at risk. The CDC considers blood levels over 10 micrograms of lead per deciliter to be a concern.

For further information about lead or mercury, call the poison control center at 1-800-222-1222. The CDC web site: www.cdc.gov or your state's health department can also provide information.

- Variable: el pescado de agua fresca (chequee los avisos del estado)

Medidas para otros:

- Limite el consumo del tiburón o sierra, a dos veces por mes
- Para otro tipo de pescado o marisco no hay limite
- Variable: el pescado de agua fresca (chequee los avisos regulatorios del estado)

Llame al Centro de Control de Envenamiento o al Departamento de Salud para las guías a seguir para el consumo de pescado.

Direcciones en el Internet para avisos de pescado en general en New England:

Connecticut:

www.dph.state.ct.us/bch/eeoh/webfish.htm

Massachusetts:

www.mass.gov/dph/beh/fishlist.htm

New Hampshire:

www.dhhs.nh.gov/dhhs/hlthriskassess/library/fact+sheet/mercury-facts.htm

Rhode Island: www.healthri.org/environment/risk/fish.htm

Vermont:

<http://www.state.vt.us/health/fish.htm>

Maine:

<http://www.maine.gov/dhs/ehu/fish/>

Plomo

El plomo es relativamente común en el medioambiente de nuestro diario vivir. Pintura despilada o en polvo, en la tierra, o en el agua que bebemos pueden contener plomo. El envenenamiento de plomo es de más seriedad en las mujeres embarazadas y niños.

La pintura que contiene plomo puede envenenar si se consume. A medida que la pintura se pone vieja se despila en forma de cascaras y se convierte en polvo. Este polvo se acumula en el piso y en las ventanas. Los niños que gatean y tienen sus juguetes en el piso se exponen más al plomo porque al jugar ellos se meten las manos y juguetes en la boca y a su vez el

plomo entra en su cuerpo. El plomo fue removido de la pintura comercial o vendida desde del 1978. Si su casa, escuela, lugar de trabajo, o niñería fue construida antes del 1978 pregunte si su pintura fue removida o si fue sobre pintada para evitar el despilamiento. No haga mejoras a su hogar sin antes consultar un experto en el remover del plomo. Usted tiene que proteger su salud y también la de su familia.

Algunos trabajos e intereses pueden ser recursos de plomo. Las personas que trabajan en fábricas de baterías, soldadura de tubería,

reparación de radiadores, tinte de vidrio, galerías de tiro al blanco, tienen más posibilidades de contaminar su hogar al traer plomo en su ropa. Remueva su ropa y cambiese en su sitio de trabajo y lavese separados de otros.

La tubería, soldadura, válvulas y plumas pueden contaminar su agua. Tubería, equipo, y soldadura que conecta su tubería pueden contener plomo. Al medida que el agua se mantiene en las tuberías por varias horas esta absorbe plomo. El plomo no tiene olor ni sabor. Se recomienda que haga una prueba de su agua

**Seasonal
Poison
Prevention
Tips**

Splish, Splash, Safety!

By: Jill Griffin, MPH

Summer brings school vacation, warm weather and lots of outdoor activities. A favorite summer pastime is swimming and playing in the swimming pool. In order to keep our pools clean and healthy, we have to use a variety of chemicals to treat the water. While these chemicals keep our water clear, they can also be very dangerous if used incorrectly. In addition to the toxic health effects of exposure to chlorinated chemicals and strong acids used to treat pool and spa water, explosions can occur if certain chemicals are mixed together. Be sure to always follow the manufacturer's instructions for the use and storage of these chemicals.

According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR),

most health-related incidents associated with chlorine happen when it is inhaled. Chlorine's strong smell and irritant properties usually provide a good warning that toxic gases are in the air. However, prolonged, low-level exposures, such as those that occur in the workplace, can lead to increased tolerance to chlorine's irritant effects, making it difficult to smell the gas. Chlorine is heavier than air and may cause a person to stop breathing if they are in an enclosed or low-lying area. Children are at higher risk for poisoning because of their size and height.

Follow poison safety precautions with these chemicals and all other household products. In general, here are some tips for pool chemical use and storage:

Usage

- Read, and follow, the labels and directions carefully before you open or use the product.
- Step outside of the pool house before opening chemical containers.
- Hands must be clean and dry. Always wash hands before and after handling chemicals and promptly wash off any chemicals that get on your skin.
- Never use metallic utensils - use plastic, glass, china or enamelware utensils and buckets only and be sure they are clean and dry.
- Add chemicals to water. Never add water to chemicals.
- Always add the chemicals directly to the pool water, either in a suitable feeder, or diluted and poured into the water.
- Never add chemicals to the pool water while swimmers are

si tiene tuberías viejas. No absorbemos suficientes cantidades de plomo a través de la piel como para envenenarnos a través de baños.

Plomo es peligroso para las mujeres durante su embarazo y para niños. Dolores estomacales, dolores de cabeza, anemia, y irritabilidad pueden ocurrir. Niños pueden desarrollar problemas de aprendizaje y comportamiento. En casos severos pueden haber daños permanentes al cerebro y riñones.

Consulte con su pediatra cuando su hijo cumpla un año o antes. La única manera de

saber el nivel del plomo en la sangre de su hijo(a) es hacer un examen de la sangre para el plomo. Niños que viven o que visitan con regularidad viviendas hechas antes del 1978 tienen un alto riesgo de envenenamiento del plomo.

Para más información sobre el mercurio y el plomo llame al Centro de Control de Envenenamiento 1-800-222-1222, el Departamento de Salud de su estado o vaya a la dirección en el internet www.cdc.gov.

using the pool.

- Never mix chemicals together. Use a clean scoop for each chemical, and never combine material from "old" and "new" containers.
- Wash out empty disinfectant containers before disposing to eliminate danger of fire, explosion or poisoning and do not reuse the container.
- Carefully clean up any spilled chemicals with large amounts of water.
- Do not inhale dust or fumes from any pool chemicals. If necessary use protective devices for breathing, skin and eye protection.
- Use a reliable test kit to test pool water. Add the necessary chemicals according to test results and the manufacturer's instructions.
- If you have any questions regarding safe handling, stor-

age or use of pool chemicals, contact the manufacturer.

Storage

- Chemical reagents for test kits should be replaced each year.
- Do not stack different chemicals on top of one another.
- Physically separate all different forms of chemicals, liquid from dry.
- Store your pool chemicals in a clean, cool, dry, well-ventilated area in the original container with tight lids.
- Keep acids away from other chemicals.
- Do not store your pool chemicals where other flammable items may mix with them. For example, a mixture of pool chemicals and fertilizer can cause a fire or explosion.

New England Newsletter goodbye

The New Hampshire Poison Information Center (NHPIC), located at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center will be closing after 47 years of operation on June 30, 2004. Through a competitive bid process, the State of New Hampshire has awarded a contract to the Northern New England Poison Center affiliated with the Maine Medical Center in Portland, to provide poison information services for NH residents. The staff has enjoyed providing the residents in NH with a comprehensive Poison Information Center that has offered clinical and education services throughout the state. Although disappointed and saddened by the news, we want you to know that there will be no break in provision of poison information service. Starting July 1, 2004 the 1-800-222-1222 number from area code 603 will be answered in Maine. As we say goodbye in this newsletter, we wish for continued success with this public education endeavor. Questions or concerns may be directed by email to; Dennis.G.Tobin@Hitchcock.ORG.



Fickle Food

By: Jill B. Brooker BSN, RN, CSPI

Summer days are finally here! Long stretches of daylight are perfect for indulging in our favorite outdoor pastimes. Long days usually mean taking food along with us. During this time food is often left un-refrigerated. If bacteria begins to grow on and in the food, and we then eat it, we may be in for some uncomfortable after effects.

There are many different types of bacteria that can cause food poisoning in humans. Typically, after a person has ingested bad food they will get stomach and intestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. While a normally healthy adult can tolerate these kinds of symptoms over the period of a day, we worry most about young children, the elderly or chronically ill adults. These folks tend to become sicker and can become dehydrated quickly.

Some bacteria are more dangerous than others. We've all heard about serious problems following food poisoning with bacteria such as Salmonella, E-Coli and Botulism. While these illnesses can be very serious, most people suffering from food poisoning are not ill as a result of encounters with these particular bacteria.

Here are some helpful hints when it comes to keeping food bacteria free this summer.

- Bacteria like to grow in a temperature range of 40 – 140 degrees Fahrenheit, Avoid keeping foods in this temperature range. Do not eat foods that have been out of this range over 2 hours.
- Use shallow dishes for foods so that they will heat thoroughly and chill quickly and evenly.
- During a power outage your refrigerator will remain cold for about 4-6 hours and a half full freezer can last for up to one day if you don't frequently open the door.
- Don't keep groceries in a hot car for more than 2 hours, and eat hot take out food within 2 hours of purchase.

- Cook red meat until the pink is gone and chicken until there is no red in the joints.
- When working with food, regularly wash hands, counters, cutting boards and utensils with warm, soapy water.
- Do not re-use a plate for cooked meat that had been used for raw meat without washing it thoroughly.
- Foods like rice, meat, fish, eggs, creams (like those found in éclairs or custards), potato salad, milk and milk products, gravies and cooked pasta can become good breeding grounds for food bacteria.
- If food containers look different or damaged, don't buy, or eat the food out of them.
- Foods that are bad spoiled will not necessarily taste, smell or look off.
- If a person has developed mild stomach upset, like vomiting and diarrhea, try to keep them well hydrated with water or other clear fluids such as Gatorade™.
- A person can stay adequately hydrated if they sip a tablespoon of water every 15-30 minutes. By taking small sips, the fluid is more likely to stay down.
- Do not give any medicine to stop diarrhea unless advised otherwise by your physician. Doing so may lengthen the course of the illness.
- Symptoms usually show up from 6 - 48 hours after eating bad food, but can show up sooner, or later.
- When should you call a doctor? If symptoms are severe and/or last more than 24 hours, or if the person is young, pregnant, elderly or has a chronic illness, get medical help immediately. .

Resources:

<http://www.foodsafety.gov/>

<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/mph/>

USDA Meat and

Poultry Hotline: Phone: 1-888-674-6854

Poison Myths & Misconceptions

Holy Moldy!

By: Amy Hanoian Fontana, M.A.

Hearing about “toxic mold” or “black mold” in the news? Concerned about your home, family, or workplace? Let the poison center dispel some myths about indoor mold.

Myth: All molds are bad.

Fact: Part of the fungus family, molds have an important job in our environment. They help get rid of dead organic material like a clean-up crew. In addition, there are important medical benefits from molds, namely they are used to make some antibiotics.

Myth: I keep my house clean, so there is no way I could have mold.

Fact: Mold is everywhere, indoors and outdoors, and can't be removed completely from our environment. Every building has some mold although it may not be visible. It can grow on wood, paper, carpet, and foods. Mold is usually not a problem indoors until unless it grows on wet surfaces. Mold needs water or moisture to grow.

Myth: Mold is mold is mold.

Fact: There are many different types of molds. Some can be found indoors and others are more common outdoors. Molds come in different colors; white, black, green, and red. Molds are sized differently too. Only certain sizes of mold spores can become airborne indoors and pose health risks to the humans that live there.

Myth: All molds are extremely harmful and life threatening.

Fact: Molds MAY cause illness in humans in 3 major ways: allergy, infection, and toxicity. Inhaling molds or having skin contact with molds may cause allergic reactions to those who are sensitive. It is estimated that about 1 in every 20 persons is mold allergic; however, the most of these individuals are also allergic to a wide variety of other substances (like plant pollen or animal dander). Reactions that follow

exposure to mold can sometimes happen right away or may take time to occur. Allergic symptoms typically include sneezing, runny nose, red eyes, or skin rash. People with asthma who are also allergic to mold may have an increased risk of asthma attacks. Serious infections from molds are rare. The toxins made by molds do not represent a health hazard threat for people in the typical home, office, or school setting.

Myth: *Stachybotrys chartarum* (commonly known as “toxic black mold”) is the deadliest of the molds.

Fact: Usual contact with *stachybotrys* does not cause long-term severe health effects. There is no convincing little medical evidence to support the concerns that eating, touching, or breathing in *Stachybotrys* mold spores results in allergy, infection or toxicity in humans. There have been concerns about human health effects based on reports of infants developing a bleeding lung illness associated with indoor residential exposure to *Stachybotrys* mold. Closer review of these reports and other studies by public health investigators authorities has cast doubt that *Stachybotrys* mold spores caused the illness.

Myth: Once there is mold in my home there is nothing I can do about it.

Fact: Mold problems can often be solved by taking a common sense approach. First, identify and fix the cause of moisture problems in a home (e.g., leaky roof or window), then dry wet areas thoroughly, and always clean an area of any visible mold promptly (within 24-48 hours) after such a problem is discovered. Unless the source of the moisture or water is found and fixed, mold is likely to grow back. For more information visit the National Center for Environmental Health's website (www.epa.gov/iaq/molds/moldguide.html).



For poison emergencies anywhere in the U.S.A. call
1 (800) 222-1222

The following names are the poison center educators serving the New England region.

Amy Hanoian-Fontana
Connecticut Poison Control Center
University of CT Health Center
Farmington, CT
<http://poisoncontrol.uchc.edu>
hanoian@uchc.edu
(860) 679-4422

Rebecca Miller
Northern New England
Poison Control Center
Maine Medical Center
Portland, ME
<http://www.mmc.org>
miller@mmc.org
(207) 842-7224

Vilma Rodriguez
Regional Center for Poison
Control and Prevention Serving
Massachusetts and Rhode Island
Children's Hospital
Boston, MA
<http://www.maripoisoncenter.com/>
vilmar@doh.state.ri.us
(617) 355-4163

Jill Brooker, Editor
New Hampshire Poison
Information Center
Dartmouth-Hitchcock
Medical Center
Lebanon, NH
http://www.dhmc.org/dept/poison_control
Jill.B.Brooker@Hitchcock.ORG
(603) 650-8054

Kelly Cota
Northern New England Poison
Control Center
Fletcher Allen Healthcare
Burlington, VT
<http://www.fahc.org>
kelly.cota@vtmednet.org
(802) 847-0888