

Shots - NPR's Health Blog

Poisonings Of Kids With Household Chemicals Decline, But Remain A Problem

Categories: [Research](#), [Children's Health](#)

09:20 am

August 2, 2010

by CHAO DENG

Parents, babysitters and daycare centers, listen up. Lots of kids still get hurt by household cleaners and chemicals each year.



Jason Reekie/iStockphoto.com

Keep the bleach away from kids.

A nationwide study suggests that we're doing a better job at protecting our kids, but there's a lot of room for improvement.

The good news is that injuries from household cleaning products dropped by almost half to about 12,000 in 2006 from around 22,000 in 1990.

The decrease surprised the researchers. While they welcomed the drop, they were also careful to note that the overall decline isn't the whole story.

Accidents from chemicals in spray bottles increased. And the researchers think that there could be many more injuries out there because their study looked only at cases reported in emergency rooms.

The results will be published in the September issue of *Pediatrics* and are currently available [online](#).

Kids between 1 and 3 years old accounted for almost three-quarters of the cases. More than half of the injuries were from kids eating or drinking the toxic products. The No. 1 problem: [bleach](#), the chemical culprit nearly 37 percent of the time.

The risk to kids is greatest when they start to crawl or walk, and are still at an age when they spend most of their time at home, says lead author [Lara McKenzie](#) of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. She says younger children are especially attracted to the bright colors and fresh scents of many cleaning products from the house.

To understand what your kids see, toxicology expert [Dr. Heath Jolliff](#) says just sit on your kitchen floor and look around. And, remember that kids act fast. Dr. Jolliff treats children at the Central Ohio Poison Center where he often hears parents say, "I was only out of the room for 10 seconds." His told Shots, "Yep, that's all it takes."

Jolliff explained that kids like to imitate adults. They might climb on stools to open cabinets that their parents didn't think were accessible. A can of insecticide can look like cooking spray, and a powdery sink scrubber can look like grated parmesan cheese.

Data from poison control centers [around the nation](#) suggests that the number of injuries in kids associated with household cleaning products increased slightly in the last decade, according to Jolliff. It's not clear, however, whether that increase reflects more accidents or parents turning more often to poison control centers than emergency rooms for help.

Experts' [advice](#) to parents remains largely the same: Lock cabinets containing toxic chemicals and keep products in original containers. For questions, try the local [poison control center](#), which you can reach at 1-800-222-1222.

Jolliff suggests keeping the number in your cell phone.

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Recent First



Chris Adams (ConsiderABike) wrote:

Yeah so all those toxic cleaning products aren't necessary. Humans have got along for THOUSANDS of years without them, and I get along just fine without them today (I don't get sick!). Maybe we should just start asking the most basic questions. Why do I have to bleach this? What is more toxic, the bleach itself, or an unbleached countertop? Why can't I use nontoxic alternatives? Does GOOD science prove vinegar is ineffective? But then again...folks who use toxic chemicals and suffer the consequences are just naturally selecting themselves out of the population.

Tuesday, August 03, 2010 9:43:52 AM

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Sandy Gracia (Dotherightthing) wrote:

By all means, parents should consider using nontoxic cleansers in their homes. And feed your kids as healthy as possible including Gudernoobs made by WooHoo Foods. High in omega 3s!

Monday, August 02, 2010 8:30:02 PM

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Larry fer (littlefer) wrote:

Gosh, I wonder why liberal groups/politicians aren't rushing to demand all household chemicals be locked up unless in immediate use and demanding the parents of poisoned children do jail time? The slaughter of innocents must stop. Anyone handling toxins like bleach need to take a certified course and be licensed by the state.

Monday, August 02, 2010 4:51:14 PM

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Jay Peterson (_Jay_) wrote:

I use vinegar and baking soda to clean areas as well as bleach, but getting rid of such toxic cleaning supplies doesn't deal with the rest of the house. If you don't have bleach, then do you have rubber cement, Dawn dishwashing detergent, Cascade, hand sanitizer, or paint? All such items have warnings. These must be dealt with, as well.

Monday, August 02, 2010 4:07:12 PM

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Cindy Ballard (SnowflakeGal) wrote:

I worry a lot about all the plug-in "air fresheners" people are using. They are pretty and smell good (okay, maybe not so much) and they are easily accessible.

Monday, August 02, 2010 3:50:22 PM

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Marty Kassowitz (mkass) wrote:

We must remember that it is not only acute poisons in the home environment that area problem. There is also the slow pollution from everyday products that has to be confronted. Here's video that makes this point much better than I can:

<http://organicconnectmag.com/wp/2010/02/slow-death-by-rubber-duck/>

Monday, August 02, 2010 3:47:45 PM

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natalya buckel (tally) wrote:

Vinegar, lemon rinds, baking soda and other non toxic items clean just as well as toxic products (and are considerably cheaper). Growing up my mom made her own (non toxic) cleaning supplies and now we continue the legacy with our kids. It just makes sense! And if you don't want to make your own, Simple Green and Method brand products work well and are also safe for use around kids.

Monday, August 02, 2010 2:09:10 PM

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Hatshepsut Nile (publichealth) wrote:

Jay,

We have always done the same with harsh chemicals, but neglected the deodorant and lotion, which our children managed to find. We clean with good ol baking soda and vinegar now.

Monday, August 02, 2010 12:34:26 PM

[Recommend \(2\)](#)

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Mark Pachankis (KarlPopperFan) wrote:

I think it would be interesting to break down these incidents by socio-economic standings.

Monday, August 02, 2010 12:20:09 PM

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Jay Peterson (_Jay_) wrote:

I also recommend keeping chemicals in a separate room from where the kids have access, rather than the kitchen or bathroom. We keep chemicals on high shelves in the laundry room and closet, both closed with child-resistant door knob covers.

I prefer to buy generic bleach, as we just use it for cleaning. However, I've noticed that the cheaper brands of bleach do not have child-proof caps on them. So I still buy the cheaper stuff and use it to refill Clorox-brand bottles. However, be aware that there is a shelf-life on bleach and that the plastic caps can corrode. One of my bleach bottles that I had for about two years had a cap that had crumbled, making it useless as a child-proof cap. It was on a very high shelf in a cleaning caddy, but warned me to verify the integrity of all of our expected child-proof caps and to replace the bottles occasionally.

Monday, August 02, 2010 12:11:48 PM

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