



# Spray cleaners pose poison hazard to babies, toddlers

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By **Liz Szabo**, USA TODAY



By Tamara Ensign

Keegan Ensign swallowed some liquid dish soap when his mother turned her back briefly. Keegan, however, is one of the luckier children who manage to drink household cleaners: He recovered with no lasting effects.

Spray cleaners send thousands of babies and toddlers to the emergency room each year, a new study shows.

Nearly 12,000 children under age 5 go to the emergency room each year because of injuries caused by household cleaning products, according to a study in today's *Pediatrics*. About 40% of those injuries — or nearly 4,800 cases — are caused by spray bottles, which typically don't have child-resistant caps, according to the study of 267,269 children.

**CLEAN GREEN:** Some parents skip commercial stuff for homemade cleaners

Although some spray nozzles can be turned to an "off" position, parents often leave them in spraying mode, says study author Lara McKenzie of N

ationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. And nimble children can turn the nozzles themselves.

Spray cleaners can contain a range of hazardous chemicals, from ammonia to bleach, McKenzie says. More than 740 of all small children injured by cleaning supplies in 2006 had symptoms that were life-threatening or caused long-term disabilities, the study says.

"People don't realize that the handle can be activated by a small child," says pediatrician Carl Baum of Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital. "Kids will put their mouths on the nozzle and drink it in."

McKenzie says spray bottles naturally attract children.

They usually have bright packaging, with fruity or flowery scents and bright colors, and the spray handles make them feel like squirt guns, she says.

Given that toddlers' curiosity and climbing skills usually outstrip their judgment, McKenzie says, it's easy to see why children younger than 5 account for more than half of all poisonings a year.

Poison control centers handle calls about 1 million children under 6 each year, says pediatrician Jamie Freishtat, a spokeswoman for Safe Kids USA, an advocacy group, who wasn't involved in the new study.

Although she's concerned about the risk from spray

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bottles, Freishtat says she's encouraged that other safety improvements — such as less hazardous ingredients — have helped to cut the overall number of children who are injured by cleaning products by 46% since 1990.

Tamara Ensign says it took only a few moments for her 1½-year-old son, Keegan, to get into some dish soap while the two were outside "playing carwash" with his toys.

When her back was turned, "he let out a wail that I had never heard from him before," says Ensign, 29, who lives near Columbus. "Whenever he cried and tried to talk, his voice was raspy and he let bubbles out."

Ensign got no answer from the emergency number listed on the detergent bottle but did reach a poison control center. She decided to take Keegan to an urgent-care clinic, where a doctor examined him and sent him home.

"You think you're as prepared as you can be as a parent," says Ensign, whose son had no lasting problems related to the scare. "You don't realize how scary a situation it can be, even with just dish soap."

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