

Poisoning Hazards: *Fall and Winter*



As the temperature drops, the Blue Ridge Poison Center sees an increase in calls about the following potential poisons. Be aware of the dangers so you can protect yourself and your loved ones.

Antifreeze and Windshield Wiper Fluid

Most automotive antifreeze contains *ethylene glycol*, a poisonous substance that is attractive to children and pets because it has a sweet taste. Wiper fluid with antifreeze for car windshields may contain *methanol*, which could cause serious harm including blindness if swallowed. When filling your car with antifreeze or wiper fluid, clean up any spills right away. If there is any product left in the bottle, keep it in the original container with a safety cap and store it in a locked cabinet. Empty cans should be rinsed clean with water and thrown away with safety caps in place. If

there is any suspicion that even a small amount of these products may have been swallowed call the poison center immediately.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a gas produced when any fuel is burned. Some furnaces, engines, motors, space heaters, and fireplaces are capable of leaking carbon monoxide into the air we breathe. Inhaling CO starves the body of oxygen. Symptoms of CO poisoning include headache, nausea, confusion, dizziness, drowsiness, coma or death.

Winter is a great time to have your home heating system—including all ducts, flues, and chimneys—inspected and cleaned by a professional. Be careful not to operate fuel-burning appliances in enclosed, unventilated rooms. Running the car to warm up the engine in a garage is also dangerous. Portable generators should be placed outdoors away from vents and windows as indicated in the instructions.



CO is odorless, tasteless, and invisible. It is a silent killer. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that CO claims the lives of nearly 500 people each year, and thousands more are sickened with permanent health effects. Protect your family: install CO alarms in your home.



Ice Melt Chemicals

Products designed to melt ice or snow on sidewalks and roadways may contain sodium chloride (salt), calcium salts, potassium, magnesium, or other chemicals which could be harmful when swallowed. Like all chemical products, keep locked up out of sight and reach of children.

Cold and Flu Medicines

Be careful when using prescription or over-the-counter cold and flu medications. Read the label and follow dosing instructions precisely. Some people wrongly assume that twice as much medicine will give twice the relief of symptoms. In fact, taking more than the recommended amount of medicine can cause dangerous side effects.



Also beware of *accidental* overdosing! Many cold and flu products contain a combination of active ingredients, such as decongestants, antihistamines, cough suppressants, and pain relievers. Read the labels: you may be taking the same ingredient more than once if you take more than one medicine.

Never tell a child that medicine is candy. Keep all medicines locked up out of sight and reach.



Lamp Oil

Young children may be attracted to lamp oil's bright colors and sweet smells. When swallowed, it may cause nausea or vomiting, and contact with the skin or eyes can be irritating. However, these liquid fuels are most dangerous if they get into the lungs, which may cause coughing, breathing problems, or swelling and fluid build-up in the lungs and airways. Permanent lung damage, coma, or death may follow.

Wild Berries

Many plants develop berries in the fall as a means of reproduction. If you see birds and other wildlife eating berries, remember that doesn't mean they are safe for people to eat. Children are especially attracted to the bright colors, and may not understand the difference between wild berries and the store-bought or garden-grown fruits. Learn the name of every plant growing in or around your home, and never eat berries unless they have been identified as safe by an expert. Teach children not to eat anything they find growing outdoors unless a trusted adult says it is safe.

