



Poisoning Hazards: Spring and Summer

When the weather is warm, The Blue Ridge Poison Center receives more calls about the following poisons. Be aware of the dangers. Take steps to protect yourself and your loved ones.

Lawn and Garden Chemicals

Spring is a popular time to spread fertilizer and pesticides. These chemicals are potentially poisonous if swallowed, inhaled, or if they get in your eyes or on your skin.

- Labels protect us! Read and follow instructions for safe handling, application, and disposal.
- Twice the product does not equal twice the results. Measure carefully.
- Leave products in their original container so that they won't be mistaken for something to eat or drink.
- Keep all containers locked up out of sight and reach of children.

Plants and Mushrooms

Birds and other wildlife may safely feed on many wild plants and mushrooms, but that doesn't mean they are safe for people to eat. Children are especially attracted to the bright colors of berries, and may not understand the difference between wild berries, plants or mushrooms and the ones their parents bought in a store or grew in a garden.

Don't make a deadly guess! Never eat plants, berries, or mushrooms unless they have been identified as safe by an expert. Teach children not to eat anything they find growing wild outdoors.



Pokeberry (*Phytolacca americana*) is a 10'-12' invasive plant. Though some people eat the tender young leaves, all parts of the plant can be toxic if not properly prepared.



Mosquito repellants and pesticides are not the same product.

Mosquito Repellents

Never apply a *pesticide* to your skin to prevent mosquito bites. Use a *mosquito repellent* specifically designed for that purpose. Mosquito repellents do not kill mosquitos, instead they discourage mosquitos from biting people. Applying a pesticide to your skin could be dangerous. Pesticides are a leading cause of poisoning in all age groups. Read and follow the safety instructions carefully. Always store pesticides out of the sight and reach of children and pets.

Black Widow spiders (*Latrodectus mactans*) like dark, moist, undisturbed places like sheds, barns, woodpiles, rocky places, inside meter boxes, etc. Black Widow Spiders are shiny black, and have a bright red hourglass-shape on their underside. They can be up to 1½ inches long and spin a messy, irregular web.

Spiders rarely leave their web, and only bite people when they feel threatened. Prevent spider bites by watching where you place your hands when working in outdoors, in attics, or basements. Wear long sleeves and gloves when carrying firewood.

Victims may not feel the spider bite them. Symptoms usually develop within a few hours and may include redness and swelling at the site of the bite, headache, sweating, nausea, anxiety, and severe muscle pain or cramping. Rarely, symptoms may also include chest pain or difficulty breathing. Very small children and the elderly are most at risk for serious health problems. If you suspect someone has been bitten by a black widow spider, stay calm. Death from a black widow spider bite is extremely rare; most victims recover completely with medical care.



The black widow spider lives throughout Virginia in dark, moist, undisturbed places.



Timber Rattlesnake

Venomous Snakes: Virginia is home to over 70 species of snakes, but only 3 are venomous: the *Copperhead*, *Timber Rattlesnake*, and *Water Moccasin* (also known as the *Cottonmouth*.) Snake are generally active between April and October, when it is warm outdoors. They hunt for food in tall grass, forested areas, or rocky places where they are hidden from predators...and you.

Snakebite victims may experience any of these symptoms: intense pain spreading out from the bite; swelling and bruising (may become severe); sweating; weakness; nausea and vomiting; and a drop in blood pressure. NOTE: Death from snake bites in Virginia is *extremely rare*. Stay calm. Take the victim to a health care facility as soon as possible, where they can have access to medical care and antivenom, if needed. **Do not** apply ice or tourniquets to snake bites, and **do not** try to suction out the venom.

Prevent snake bites:

- Watch where you put your hands and feet or sit down when outdoors.
- Wear long pants and shoes in tall grass or wooded areas.
- Walk with a flashlight outdoors in the dark.
- Many snakebites happen when someone is trying to catch or kill a snake. If you find a snake, just leave it alone. If someone is bitten, you don't need to bring the snake with you to show the doctor.

**Call the Blue Ridge Poison Center 24 hours a day, every day, for advice and support:
1-800-222-1222. Free and confidential.**