



TOXTALKS

A BULLETIN FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS WHO MANAGE POISONED PATIENTS

Blue Ridge Poison Center

| University of Virginia Health

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Why Should I Call The Blue Ridge Poison Center?

Introduction

There are currently 55 regional poison centers (PCs) serving the United States and surrounding territories. Historically PCs were created as a public health measure to address pediatric poisonings, and more specifically to promote the reduction of morbidity and mortality from poisonings through public and professional education and scientific research. Currently, they continue to be a valuable resource for the American public providing information regarding potentially poisonous or toxic exposures.

Who makes calls to America's Poison Centers?

Members of the public and various professionals make calls to regional PCs. Healthcare professionals include individuals working in local EMS agencies, urgent cares, physician's offices, schools, nursing homes, rehab facilities, emergency departments and other areas of the hospital. The **Blue Ridge Poison Center** serves 42 hospitals in Virginia.

What happens when a call is made to the regional PC?

Certified Specialists in Poison Information, or CSPIs, answer calls made to the PC. At the Blue Ridge Poison Center, all of our CSPIs are registered nurses with solid clinical experience. CSPIs will collect relevant clinical data, make a case assessment, and provide the caller with management recommendations. Depending on the case complexity, CSPIs will often consult medical toxicologists before getting back to the caller. CSPIs also offer medical toxicology physician consultation to healthcare professionals.

Information exchanged during the initial call and follow-up calls is entered into an electronic medical record and uploaded, in near real time, to the **National Poison Data System (NPDS)**, a data warehouse for all U.S. PCs. The centralized nature of data allows poison centers to play a role in the early warning of disease outbreaks caused by toxicological hazards. Depending on the nature of the exposure, if uploaded data exceed specific thresholds for call volume or fits a certain case based definition, an alert goes to a group of toxicologists and epidemiologists at the

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and America's Poison Centers to determine its public health significance.

What information is needed when making these calls?

During the call, CSPIs will collect information regarding the caller, the patient and the exposure. The caller name, relation to the exposed individual(s), a call back number, and zip code are recorded. Basic patient demographics including patient's weight, their past medical history, current medications and patient condition (signs and symptoms) at the time of the call are collected. The substance(s) description (dose, quantity, formulation), the time, duration and acuity and route of exposure are also recorded. Last, therapies or interventions already performed (if any) are documented.

Why should I call the PC?

The PC's objective is to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with poisonings. The involvement of PCs in case management have been shown to decrease visits to healthcare entities if the call originates in the home, and decreases the length of stay and associated healthcare costs if the patient is in a health system. For every dollar invested in PCs, there is an average of \$13.39 medical care savings and reduced productivity loss benefit. Poison centers are part of the public health infrastructure. There have been over 74 million recorded calls to U.S. poison centers since 2000. This data is shared with key regulatory agencies, such as the Food and Drug Administration, Drug Enforcement Agency, Consumer Product Safety Commission, and contributes to drug safety monitoring, identification of emerging substance use, and toxicity of chemicals.

The Blue Ridge Poison Center receives funding from University of Virginia Health, the Virginia Department of Health, and the U.S. Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA). We are accredited by the [American Association of Poison Control Centers](#). We've been proudly serving the Commonwealth of Virginia since 1978. Call 1-800-222-1222, or the dedicated provider hotline at 1-800-451-1428.

Friedman LS, Krajewski A, Vannoy E, Allegretti A, Wahl M. The association between U.S. Poison Center assistance and length of stay and hospital charges. Clin Toxicol (Phila). 2014 Mar;52(3):198-206. [\[PubMed\]](#)

Galvão TF, Silva MT, Silva CD, Barotto AM, Gavioli IL, Bucaretti F, Atallah AN. Impact of a poison control center on the length of hospital stay of poisoned patients: retrospective cohort. Sao Paulo Med J. 2011 Jan 06;129(1):23-9. [\[PubMed\]](#)

