

## Holiday Poisoning Hazards



Preparations for the holidays are happy, hectic times that can double the risk of toxic exposures. Not only are attractive items brought into the home, but the disruption of the household routine means less supervision of curious children. Even safe homes can become hazardous when visitors bring purses with pills in them. Other hazards include:

**Poinsettia:** This plant is actually not very toxic, but the sap can be irritating. If a piece of the plant has been chewed, clear the mouth of plant material and offer the person something to drink.

**Holly:** Eating a few berries can cause vomiting, cramps and diarrhea and possible drowsiness.

**Mistletoe:** Eating berries can cause vomiting, cramps and diarrhea. Large amounts can cause high blood pressure, seizures and confusion.

**Christmas trees:** Evergreen trees are non-toxic except for the Yew, which has red cup-like fruits on its branches. The needle shaped leaves and seed pits are toxic. Some people can have an allergic reaction to the sap of an evergreen tree. If you add a preservative to the water in the Christmas tree stand, make sure it is nontoxic.

**Christmas tree ornaments:** Antique or imported ornaments may have lead-based paint which would be a hazard if ingested.

**Food Poisoning:** Often large amounts of food are left out for hours during holiday celebrations. This can lead to bacterial growth and contamination. Keep hot foods hot and cold food cold. Refrigerate leftovers as soon as guests are done eating.

**Tinsel:** Although tinsel is non-toxic, the shiny icicles can cause airway or intestinal blockage if eaten by children or pets. Veterinarians sometimes perform an operation each Christmas season to remove tinsel from pets' intestines.

**Angel Hair:** This tree decoration is made of spun glass that causes irritation upon contact with the mouth, eyes or stomach.

**Bubble Lights:** These lights sometimes contain a poisonous liquid called methylene chloride that can be a danger if the fluid from several lights is swallowed.



**Alcohol:** Alcohol harms children by causing a drop in their blood sugar and by making them dangerously drowsy. A combination of these two factors can cause coma. Holiday alcohol is available in many forms: perfume given as a gift, mixed drinks leftover after a party, or even mouthwash by the bathroom sink.



**For an emergency or question about poisons, call  
the Wisconsin Poison Center toll free 24 hour hotline:  
1-800-222-1222**

## Wisconsin Poison Center

Serving people of all ages.

