

## Poison-Safe Back-to-School

Maryland Poison Center  
University of Maryland School of Pharmacy  
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Schools are back in session. This means children are away from parents and making decisions on their own. Parents can use the following information to help keep their children poison-safe.

Parents should remind their young children that markers, crayons, glue, glitter and other school supplies belong on paper, not in their mouths. Eating plants, berries and mushrooms on the school yard could make them sick. Medicines should only be taken from a safe adult and never from a friend. After school programs and babysitters should have the poison center phone number ready if a poisoning happens.

Pre-teens, teenagers and college students face different and often serious poison dangers. Parents should talk with their children openly and honestly about substances that can harm them. These conversations may not be comfortable, but they may save their lives.

Caffeine is a widely-used stimulant. It is found in coffee and soda in modest amounts. Energy drinks and energy shots are a popular source of caffeine among young people. They may contain larger amounts of caffeine than soda. Energy products can have added ingredients that have similar effects to caffeine. Pure caffeine powder is also available on the internet. While deaths related to caffeine are rare, overdoses are becoming more common. High doses of caffeine can cause nausea, vomiting, nervousness, sweating, tremor, increased heart rate, headache, and seizures. Athletes should never use energy drinks to boost performance or replace fluids. The effects on the heart and blood pressure can be severe. And because caffeine is a diuretic, they will end up losing even more fluids. Parents should discuss the safe use of caffeine with their children.

According to the 2013 Monitoring the Future Survey, alcohol is the most widely used substance by teenagers today. In fact, 7 out of 10 students have consumed more than a few sips of alcohol by the end of high school. About half of 12th graders surveyed admitted to being drunk at least once in their life. Minor effects from drinking alcohol include drowsiness, difficulty walking, nausea, vomiting and decreased inhibitions. Coma, decreased breathing, and low blood sugar are some of the symptoms seen with larger amounts of alcohol. Mixing alcohol with energy drinks is common among young people. While they may be more awake, the alcohol will still affect their judgment and slow reaction time. And they will still have the caffeine-related effects on their heart. A discussion about alcohol with young people should include how it affects themselves as well as affecting others.

Safe use of prescription and over-the-counter medicines should be a regular conversation between parents and their children. Directions on all medications should

be followed exactly. Medicines should never be shared with friends. When taken incorrectly, prescription and over-the-counter medicines are as dangerous as illicit drugs.

Bath salts, synthetic marijuana, Molly and Ecstasy are in the news frequently. Young people who use these substances are truly playing Russian roulette because nobody really knows what they contain. Some of these can be bought at convenience stores or on the internet. Others may be purchased at concerts or shared at parties. Making these substances illegal is challenging because as soon as one chemical is outlawed, the street chemists make changes to invent a new one that is not illegal.

Communication is one way to keep your children, at home or at college, poison-safe. Don't assume they are aware of these dangers. A conversation today can make the school year safe and productive. But should you find yourself in need of help with a poisoning or overdose, know the pharmacists and nurses at the poison center are available 24/7 by dialing 1-800-222-1222!

<http://www.mdpoison.com/families/pppress.html>