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OREGON POISON CENTER URGES CAUTION DURING SUMMER RECREATION SEASON

PORTLAND, Ore. – The outdoor recreation season in the Northwest means increased exposure to poison hazards for both adults and children. Nationwide, poison centers take more than 6,600 calls a day during the height of summer vacation season, a thousand more a day than in January. “Simply being outdoors can increase potential exposure to poison hazards,” said Tonya Drayden, RN, MSN, CSPI, Education Coordinator at the Oregon Poison Center at OHSU. “In addition, there is increased use of toxic substances such as pesticides and insect repellents during the summer.”

Here are some of the most common summer poison hazards:

Plant poisons

Poison hazards from plants are of particular concern, not just in the Northwest’s lush forests, but also in urban and suburban backyards. Parents should talk with their children about which plants are edible and which are not. Master gardeners in local garden centers can often help identify which common yard plants are edible. All wild mushrooms are considered potential poisons unless evaluated by a trained mushroom expert.

Insect and animal bites

During the summer, many insect populations are at their peak. To decrease your chance of being bitten or stung, avoid scented perfumes, lotions and cosmetics, along with brightly colored and patterned clothing. Avoid going barefoot, especially through vegetation. If you or someone nearby does get bitten, watch for signs of an allergic reaction such as rapid swelling of the bitten area. If you are having difficulty breathing, call 911 immediately. Call the Oregon Poison Center or your physician if you have any other reactions to an insect bite. Animal bites, especially from wild animals, can also pose a poison hazard, causing infection or scarring.

Pesticides/insect repellents

The pesticides used to repel or kill insects can be hazards in themselves. Choose insect repellents that are safe for children and apply them as directed. Never let children apply insect repellent unsupervised, and store these substances out of the reach of children.

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Decreased supervision of children

When they're out of school, children may roam freely around your house and garden with minimal supervision. Make sure all toxic substances, such as charcoal lighter fluid and paint thinner, are out of their reach and that medications are stored securely in a medicine cabinet out of the reach of children. If you go on a family vacation, be sure to store any medications where children cannot easily discover them.

Food poisoning

Picnics and potlucks are one of the most enjoyable parts of summer. But warm temperatures combined with improper food preparation and storage can lead to food poisoning. Symptoms can include vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramps.

The Oregon Poison Center recommends individuals and families post the toll-free poison center number by all telephones in the house. The poison HELP nationwide number is 1-800-222-1222. No matter where you are calling from in the U.S., you will be automatically routed to the nearest poison control center. Nurse specialists trained in poison information and poison emergency management are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Those with internet access can also take a Poison Summer Safety IQ quiz, covering the topics listed above and more. The quiz can be found at www.1-800-222-1222.info.

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