

POISONology

SAFETY & FIRST AID TIPS FROM THE ARIZONA POISON AND DRUG INFORMATION CENTER

Bleach - a 'popular' source of accidental poisonings



Someone accidentally drinking bleach occurs more often than one might think. About once a day, we field a phone call at the poison center dealing with a swallowed mouthful of bleach. How does this happen accidentally? Typically, the bleach has been poured into an unmarked container. The unsuspecting individual takes a swig of what looks like water and there you have it. The most common symptoms from this accidental poisoning are sore throat, nausea, vomiting, and/or difficulty swallowing

What should you do if someone accidentally drinks bleach?

First of all, call the poison center to be sure the person has not swallowed a dangerous amount.

- We may recommend drinking 4-8 ounces of water or milk to aid in the dilution.
- What is **important is to NOT force vomiting to try and rid your body of the chemical.** This is definitely more harmful than helpful. Your stomach can handle the small amount of swallowed bleach. We run into problems when people try to force vomiting, because they put themselves at risk for aspiration. Aspiration is the inhalation of either secretions from the back of the throat and nasal cavity or stomach contents into the lower airways of the lungs. This can potentially lead to an acute, chemical lung injury resulting from the inhalation of the contents.
- We may recommend an individual **go to the ER for an evaluation if the vomiting and/or difficulty swallowing persist for more than an hour, or if they experience chest pain at any time.**
- The easiest prevention of the accident is to **keep the bleach in the original container.** As convenient as it may seem to store bleach in a cup, water bottle or unmarked spray bottle for cleaning, the potential consequences of an accidental poisoning are not worth it.
- Obviously if someone is trying to intentionally harm themselves, and drinks more than a mouthful, then an immediate evaluation by an ER physician is needed. Large amounts of swallowed bleach can produce more significant, potentially life-threatening problems.

If you have other poisoning concerns or questions call the tollfree national hotline at 1-800-222-1222 to reach your local poison center. If you live in Arizona outside of Maricopa County, this number will get you to our experts at the Arizona Poison and Drug Information Center in Tucson..