

# Unintentional Poisoning in Saskatchewan Children

## 10 Years in Review (2004 – 2013)



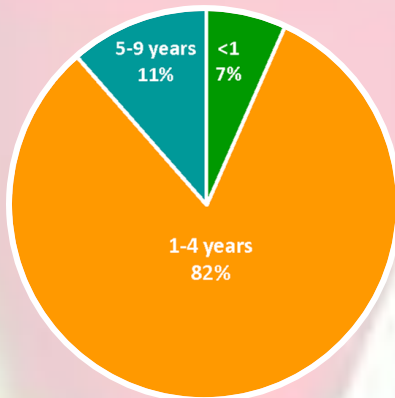
### Facts About Unintentional Poisoning

Unintentional poisoning is a leading cause of death, hospitalizations, emergency room visits, partial disability, and permanent total disability in Saskatchewan (Parachute, 2015; *The Cost of Injury in Canada*).

**What is a poison?** A substance that can cause illness or death when it is **eaten**, **inhaled**, or **absorbed** through the skin.

### Young children are at particular risk of unintentional poisoning.

Between 2004 and 2013, 686 Saskatchewan children under the age of 10 were hospitalized due to unintentional poisoning<sup>1</sup>. Unintentional poisoning was the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of injury-related hospitalization in this age group.



Over 80% of the children hospitalized were between 1 and 4 years of age.



80% of these hospitalizations were due to medications and drugs. Other common causes are organic solvents<sup>1</sup> (including petroleum), alcohol, other gas and vapours, and pesticides.

**An average of 70 children under the age of 10 were hospitalized due to unintentional poisoning each year.**

<sup>1</sup> This number only includes the children who were hospitalized due to unintentional poisoning. Children who were seen in emergency rooms or medical clinics, and those who did not receive medical treatment, are not included in this number.

# Preventing Unintentional Poisoning

At each stage of development, children learn new skills (e.g., reaching, crawling, climbing, walking, exploring, and imitating the actions of others). It is important to look for the possible risks associated with each stage. Active supervision and keeping potential poisons out of reach and out of sight are vital to reducing the risk of unintentional poisoning.

Children develop at their own rates. By using poison prevention methods before children can crawl, the home will be a safer place.

## Developmental Stages and Unintentional Poisoning

- Infants and young children explore their world by putting objects in their mouths.
- Their skin is thin compared to older children and adults, making poisoning through skin contact more possible.
- Due to their small body size, even small doses of medication and poisons can be very dangerous.
- **It is important that medications, household cleaning products, and other potential poisons are kept out of sight and out of reach at all times.**
- As children become more mobile, they are able to move toward objects and climb on furniture to reach objects. It becomes even more important that all medications and potential poisons are kept out of sight and out of reach (preferably above counter-height, with medications locked up).
- As children get older, they begin to test their limits and the rules. They are curious, love to explore, and often copy others around them. Whenever possible, it is best if caregivers do not take their medications or use cleaning products in front of their young children.

## Other tips

- Learn about potential poisons in and around the home (e.g., medications, cleaning products, pesticides, products that contain alcohol, certain plants, cosmetics, soaps, and detergents).
- Keep medications, vitamins, and cleaning products in their original containers with original labels.
- Educate children about the dangers of poisons and what warning labels mean so that they can identify hazardous substances.
- Store the Saskatchewan Poison Control Centre number in phones (1-866-454-1212).

For more information about how to prevent poisoning and other injuries at each of the different developmental stages, see [www.preventchildinjury.ca](http://www.preventchildinjury.ca).

For more information about poisoning and other top causes of injury-related hospitalizations for Saskatchewan children and youth, please refer to the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute's report, *Child and youth injury in Saskatchewan 2004-2013* (see [www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca), search 4-007).