

I. POISONING

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Poisoning.

I.1 POISONING

Some substances when taken in can be dangerous to the health of human beings and can even cause death. Such substances are called 'poisons' or 'toxins'.

Poisoning can occur when these poisons are taken by accident or with a view to causing harm or committing suicide.

Poisons can get into the body by swallowing, inhaling (gases), by injection or via absorption through the skin.

I.1.1 POISONING BY SWALLOWING

Poisoning from swallowing is often caused by household products, overdose of medication or toxic plants.

The effects of poisoning depend on what poison has been swallowed.

- Acids, alkalis, disinfectants etc. swallowed burn the lips, tongue, throat, oesophagus and stomach and cause great pain.
- Other swallowed poisons cause vomiting, pain abdomen and later on diarrhoea (e.g. poisonous fungi, berries, metallic poisons).
- Some swallowed poisons affect the nervous system. To this group belong:
 - alcoholic drinks (methylated spirit, wine, whisky etc.) when taken in large quantities;
 - sleeping pills, tranquilizers, and painkillers when taken in overdoses.

Victims of poisoning must be considered as seriously ill. The symptoms are either delirium or fits or coma.

Please note that 'Food poisoning' is an illness caused by eating contaminated food. Please see the 'Food poisoning' chapter for more information on this topic.

I.1.2 POISONING BY GASES

Fumes or gases from charcoal stoves, household gas, motor exhausts and smoke from explosions etc., cause choking (asphyxia) which may result in unconsciousness in addition to difficulty in breathing. Please refer to the chapter on 'Suffocation by smoke or gasses' for more information.

I.1.3 POISONING BY INJECTION

Poisons get into the body through injection, bites of poisonous snakes and rabid dogs, or stings by scorpions and poisonous insects. Danger to life is again by choking and coma. Please refer to the chapter on animal bites for more information.

I.1.4 POISONING BY SKIN ABSORPTION

Hazardous chemicals that are spilt on the skin can cause irritation or burns. Certain substances can be also absorbed through the skin and cause damage inside the body. Please refer to the chapter on 'Chemical burns' for more information.

I.1.5 WHAT DO YOU SEE AND ENQUIRE?

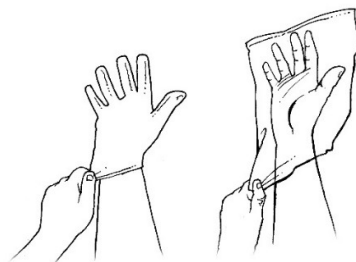
Following signs and symptoms may be observed in a case of poisoning:

- nausea and vomiting;
- pain in lips, mouth or throat;
- frothing from mouth
- abdominal pain or cramps;
- redness, skin rash;
- itching;
- swelling;
- blurred vision;
- irregular, slow or fast heartbeat (pulse);
- hyperactivity or slowness;
- muscle twitching;
- seizures;
- impaired consciousness or unconsciousness;
- difficulty in breathing;
- slow breathing; or
- cyanosis (blue-grey skin (lips)).

I.1.6 WHAT DO I DO?

I.1.6.1 SAFETY FIRST AND CALL FOR HELP

1. Secure your own safety, and then the safety of the affected person.
2. The person urgently needs help. Shout or call for help if you are alone but do not leave the person unattended. Ask a bystander to call the anti-poison centre (toll free: 1800 116 117) and to seek help or to arrange for urgent transport to the nearest healthcare facility. Tell him to come back to you to confirm if help has been secured.
3. If possible, wash your hands before and after taking care of the patient. Use soap and water to wash your hands. If no soap is available, you can use ash to wash your hands. Alcohol-based sanitizers can also be used, if available.



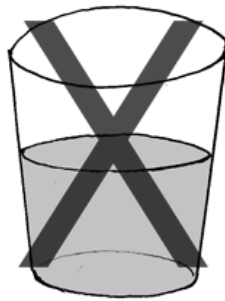
4. Use gloves to protect yourself. If gloves are not available, you can use a clean plastic bag.

I.1.6.2 PROVIDE FIRST AID

5. If possible, try to find out what poison has been swallowed, injected, inhaled or has come into contact with his skin. But be careful: do not put yourself in a dangerous situation to find the origin of the poisoning!



6. If it is safe, keep the container of the poison to show to the doctor.
7. Avoid contact with the poison.
8. If not done yet, call the poison centre for advice: 1800 116 117 (toll free).



9. Do not give the person anything to drink or eat.
Do not give milk or water to a poisoned person.
10. Do not induce vomiting.
11. Transport the person urgently to the nearest healthcare facility or hospital.

I.1.6.3 HYGIENE

Wash your hands after taking care of the patient. Use soap and water to wash your hands. If no soap is available, you can use ash to wash your hands. Alcohol-based sanitizers can also be used, if available, but may not be sufficient to remove poison.

I.1.7 WHEN TO REFER TO A HEALTHCARE FACILITY?



Always urgently transport the person to a healthcare facility or hospital for further treatment.

Being poisoned can be a dangerous situation and requires medical attention.

Always call the anti-poison centre (toll free: 1800 116 117) or a nearby hospital, healthcare facility or medical caregiver for advice on how to act in case of a specific poisoning.