# HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS

#### *What are the Health and Safety Risks?*

**S**ome household chemicals and products are more dangerous than others. Some can be used safely if the directions are followed on the label. Hazards from household chemicals include using too much of a product or misusing a product, such as mixing two products together that are dangerous when they are combined.

Children and adults can be injured or poisoned by accident. This can happen if products are misused, stored or disposed in the wrong way. Eating or drinking a hazardous product is very dangerous, sometimes deadly. Children have smaller bodies that are growing so chemicals can harm them more.

Some hazardous products can burn just by touching them and some can poison through the skin if they are touched. Others can also poison a person when they breathe them in. Exposure to these chemicals might make a person feel sick to their stomach or dizzy and their eyes might water, sting or hurt. Other common reactions are headaches or nasal congestion.

Sometimes a person can know right away if a family member has been poisoned by a hazardous product. But some problems don’t show up for a long time. Some chemicals can also change how a child grows and develops. Long-term contact with some products can cause cancer or damage to lungs or other organs.

Hazardous household chemicals are products for use around a house or yard that can be harmful or poisonous. It can hurt someone if it’s not used the right way. Here are some common examples:

#### ***Where Do Household Chemicals Risks Come From?***

* All-Purpose, surface and floor cleaners
* Detergent
* Medicine
* Glass cleaner
* Batteries
* Bleach
* Bug spray
* Toilet and drain cleaners
* Furniture polish
* Oven cleaner
* Rat poison
* Mothballs
* Charcoal lighter fluid
* Dishwasher pods
* Mercury thermometers
* Gasoline
* Oil
* Paint
* Shoe polish
* Glue and epoxies



**What can you do to help the families**

**and communities you serve?**

*Actions for Living in a Healthy Home*

Family Health

A stakeholder should remind all families they serve that if they think a family member has been poisoned they should call the poison control center number immediately. If a family member is exposed to, breathes in, or swallows a dangerous household chemical, they can reach a local Poison Control Center by calling **(800) 222-1222** from anywhere in the United States at any time. Families should store this number in a mobile phone or speed dial and also put it where hazardous products are stored.

Some persons can have allergies to strong chemicals which could be impacting their health and work. If a family member identifies sensitivity to chemicals during cleaning they should notify their health care provider.

##### Housekeeping and Maintenance

Most families can create a healthier home environment by changing some of their everyday practices so they don’t need to always use hazardous products for cleaning. Some suggestions for them include:

* Use only the amount of the product that is recommended.
* Steam cleaning is a good alternative for people who want to reduce their exposure to chemicals.
  + Look for products that are less toxic: “Green” is printed on some labels. It usually means safer, less toxic products. Look for products that list all ingredients and less toxic products that have been tested by a third party. Reliable third party seals include: EPA Design for the Environment, Green Seal and EcoLogo.
* Keeping a doormat by every entrance to the home to encourage “wipe your feet” habits

A stakeholder should encourage the families they work with to take the following precautions to protect the most vulnerable family members:

* Always keep hazardous products in their original containers.
* Recycle products at approved locations. Oil, antifreeze, and products with mercury can be recycled.
* Families with young children should always buy products in child-proof containers and only get medicines with child-proof caps.
* Keep all hazardous products and chemicals in a locked cabinet away from children including the kitchen, bathroom, garage and hobby areas.

Use Safely as Directed

Family members should always follow directions on the labels of household chemicals. That is one of the most important steps in using hazardous products. They should also take extra care if a label has any of these words:

* Caution
* Harmful
* Warning
* Danger
* Poison
* Flammable
* Toxic

Safe Housekeeping Habits

For each family served, healthy homes stakeholders should recommend that families:

* Always put the cap back on a product tightly and put everything away right after use.
* Do not eat, drink, or smoke when using a hazardous product, and wash hands thoroughly after use.
* Never mix products together unless directed by the product label.
* Keep children, pets, and pregnant women away from the area where the hazardous products are being used.
* Use chemical free alternatives
* Store laundry and dishwater pods away from children. They are very dangerous for children as they are brightly colored and may look like candy.
  + Keep products in the original package, can, or bottle. Never put products in another container. Keep containers and packages dry. Close containers tightly.
  + Keep household products away from heat, sparks, and fire. Don’t store anything near the furnace.
  + Store batteries and flammable chemicals like gasoline out of direct sunlight.
  + Find out where to recycle products with mercury, as it is quite toxic, even in small amounts. Some items that contain mercury are: fluorescent bulbs, thermometers, thermostats, and blood pressure meters.