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Depilatory poisoning

A depilatory is a product used to remove unwanted hair. Depilatory poisoning occurs when someone swallows this substance.

This article is for information only. DO NOT use it to treat or manage an actual poison exposure. If you or someone you are with has an exposure, call the local emergency number (such as 911), or the local poison control center can be reached directly by calling the national toll-free Poison Help hotline (1-800-222-1222) from anywhere in the United States.

Poisonous Ingredient

The harmful ingredients in depilatories are:

- Sodium or calcium hydroxide (alkalis), which are very toxic
- Barium sulfide
- Thioglycolates

There may be other poisonous ingredients in depilatories.

Where Found

These ingredients are found in various depilatories.

Symptoms

Symptoms of depilatory poisoning include:

- Abdominal pain
- Blurred vision
- Breathing difficulty
- Burning pain in the throat
- Burns to the eye (if depilatory cream gets in the eye)
- Collapse (shock)
- Coma (decreased level of consciousness and lack of responsiveness)

- Diarrhea (watery, bloody)
- Drooling
- Inability to walk normally
- Low blood pressure
- No urine output
- Rash
- Slurred speech
- Stupor (decreased level of consciousness)
- Vomiting

Home Care

Seek medical help right away. Do not make the person throw up unless poison control or a health care provider tells you to.

If the person swallowed the depilatory, give them water or milk right away, unless a provider tells you not to. Do not give water or milk if the person has symptoms that make it hard to swallow. These include:

- Vomiting
- Convulsions
- A decreased level of alertness

Before Calling Emergency

Have this information ready:

- Person's age, weight, and condition
- Name of the product (ingredients, if known)
- Time it was swallowed
- Amount swallowed

Poison Control

Your local poison control center can be reached directly by calling the national toll-free Poison Help hotline (1-800-222-1222) from anywhere in the United States. This national hotline number will let you talk to experts in poisoning. They will give you further instructions.

This is a free and confidential service. All local poison control centers in the United States use this national number. You should call if you have any questions about poisoning or poison prevention. It does NOT need to be an emergency. You can call for any reason, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

What to Expect at the Emergency Room

Take the container with you to the hospital, if possible.

The provider will measure and monitor the person's vital signs, including temperature, pulse, breathing rate, and blood pressure. Symptoms will be treated.

The person may receive:

- Blood and urine tests
- Breathing support, including tube through the mouth into the lungs and breathing machine (ventilator)
- Chest x-ray
- ECG (electrocardiogram or heart tracing)
- Endoscopy (camera placed down the throat to see burns in the esophagus and the stomach)
- Fluids through a vein (by IV)
- Surgery to remove burned skin (debridement)
- Washing of the skin, perhaps every few hours for several days

Outlook (Prognosis)

This can be a very serious poisoning. How well someone does depends on how much poison they swallowed and how quickly they receive treatment. The faster medical help is given, the better the chance for recovery.

Extensive damage to the mouth, throat, and stomach is possible. How someone does depends on how much of this damage there is. This damage can continue to develop in the esophagus (food pipe) and stomach for several weeks after the product is swallowed. If a hole forms in these organs, severe bleeding and infection can occur.

Alternative Names

Hair removal agents poisoning

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Updated by: Jesse Borke, MD, CPE, FAAEM, FACEP, Attending Physician at Kaiser Permanente, Orange County, CA. Also reviewed by David C. Dugdale, MD, Medical Director, Brenda Conaway, Editorial Director, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.

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