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Hair tonic poisoning

Hair tonic is a product used to style the hair. Hair tonic 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

Ethanol (ethyl alcohol) is the harmful ingredient in hair tonic.

Symptoms

Most symptoms are from the alcohol in these products. They are similar to the feeling of being drunk. Symptoms may include:

- Coma (decreased level of consciousness and lack of responsiveness)
- Diarrhea
- Increased urination
- Lack of alertness (stupor)
- Painful urination
- Slowed breathing
- Slurred speech
- Unsteady walk
- Vomiting, possibly bloody

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 chemical is on the skin or in the eyes, flush with lots of water for at least 15 minutes.

If the person swallowed the hair tonic, give them water or milk right away, unless a provider tells you not to. DO NOT give anything to drink 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 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 a tube through the mouth into the lungs, and a breathing machine (ventilator)
- Chest x-ray
- ECG (electrocardiogram, or heart tracing)
- Endoscopy -- camera placed down the throat to look for burns in the esophagus and the stomach.
- Fluids through a vein (by IV)
- Laxatives
- Medicines to treat symptoms

Outlook (Prognosis)

How well someone does depends on how much hair tonic they swallowed and how quickly they receive treatment. The faster medical help is given, the better the chance for recovery. Swallowing a large amount of hair tonic can cause liver failure.

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