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Dieffenbachia poisoning

Dieffenbachia is a type of house plant with large, colorful leaves. Poisoning can occur if you eat or are exposed to the leaves, stalk, or root of this plant.

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 your local emergency number (such as 911), or 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.

Poisonous Ingredient

Poisonous ingredients include:

- Oxalic acid
- Asparagine, an amino acid found in this plant

Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Blisters in the mouth
- Burning in mouth and throat
- Diarrhea
- Hoarse voice
- Increased saliva production
- Nausea and vomiting
- Pain on swallowing
- Redness, swelling, pain, and burning of the eyes, and possible corneal damage
- Swelling of mouth and tongue

Blistering and swelling in the mouth may be severe enough to prevent normal speaking and swallowing.

Home Care

Wipe out the mouth with a cold, wet cloth. Rinse the person's eyes and skin well if they touched the plant.

Give the person milk, unless instructed otherwise by poison control or a health care provider. DO NOT give milk if the person is having symptoms (such as vomiting, convulsions, or a decreased level of alertness) that make it hard to swallow.

Call poison control for more guidance.

Before Calling Emergency

Get the following information:

- Person's age, weight, and condition
- Parts of the plant that were eaten, if known
- Time 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 plant with you to the hospital, if possible.

The provider will monitor the person's vital signs, including temperature, pulse, breathing rate, and blood pressure. Symptoms will be treated as needed. The person may receive fluids through a vein (IV) and breathing support. Damage to the cornea will require additional treatment, possibly from an eye specialist.

Outlook (Prognosis)

If contact with the person's mouth is not severe, symptoms usually resolve within a few days. For people who do have severe contact with the plant, a longer recovery time may be necessary.

In rare cases, swelling is severe enough to block the airways.

DO NOT touch or eat any plant with which you are not familiar. Wash your hands after working in the garden or walking in the woods.

Alternative Names

Dumbcane poisoning; Leopard lily poisoning; Tuft root poisoning

References

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Review Date 11/2/2023

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06/01/2028

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