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Hair straightener poisoning

Hair straightener poisoning occurs when someone swallows products that are used to straighten hair.

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 hair straightening products are:

- Ammonium thioglycolate (found in relaxer/straightener products that do not use lye)
- Guanidine hydroxide (found in relaxer/straightener products that do not use lye)
- Mineral oil
- Polyethylene glycol
- Sodium hydroxide (found in relaxer/straightener products that use lye)

Where Found

Various hair straighteners contain these chemicals.

Symptoms

Below are symptoms of hair straightening poisoning in different parts of the body.

EYES, EARS, NOSE, MOUTH, AND THROAT

- Loss of vision
- Severe pain in the throat
- Severe pain or burning in the nose, eyes, ears, lips, or tongue

HEART AND BLOOD

- Collapse
- Low blood pressure that develops rapidly

- Severe change in blood acid levels (leads to organ damage)

LUNGS

- Breathing difficulty
- Throat swelling (may cause breathing difficulty)

SKIN

- Burn
- Holes in the skin or tissues under the skin
- Irritation

STOMACH AND INTESTINES

- Blood in the stool
- Burns in the food pipe (esophagus)
- Severe abdominal pain
- Vomiting (might be 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 straightener, 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 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 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 the effects of the poison.
- Surgery to remove burned skin (debridement).
- Washing of the skin (irrigation). This may need to be done every few hours for several days.

If the poisoning is severe, the person may be admitted to the hospital.

Outlook (Prognosis)

How well someone does depends on how much hair straightener 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. The outcome depends on how much of this damage has happened. Damage to the esophagus and stomach can continue to occur for several weeks after the product is swallowed. A hole can develop in these organs, and that can lead to severe bleeding and infection. Surgery may be needed to treat these and other complications.

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