

Cases of Accidental Pesticide Poisoning Among Children

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The South African Paediatric Association (SAPA) is alarmed by the recent rise in cases of accidental pesticide poisoning in children across South Africa. This preventable health risk has led to serious and often life-threatening outcomes for young children, who are especially susceptible to the toxic effects of these substances.

Pesticides are frequently used in homes to kill insects and rodents. However, improper purchase, storage and use increase the risk of accidental exposure, especially for children. Ingesting or coming into contact with even small amounts of these chemicals can cause severe symptoms including vomiting, respiratory distress, seizures, and, in extreme cases, death.

Call for action

- SAPA urges parents and caregivers to take preventive actions to keep children safe from exposure to poisonous substances. Pesticides should always be stored out of children's reach in locked or secure areas.
- Manufacturers and regulatory authorities should implement child-safe packaging and clearer warning labels, making it easier for families to understand the risks and handle pesticides safely.
- Government should restrict importation and access to unregulated pesticides.

In addition, the prevention of other accidental exposures to poisonous substance such as paraffin and medications needs consideration. Medications should always be stored away from children with child protective caps. The storage of paraffin in juice bottles should be avoided.

Resource for health professionals

The **AfriTox poison information database** is maintained by the University of Cape Town Poison Information Centre and is an essential resource that is **freely available to all state hospital institutions** (subscriptions for individuals and private hospitals are also available at minimal cost). Visit <https://www.afritox.co.za/> to apply or find out more. Furthermore, we encourage health care workers to familiarise themselves with common toxidromes. Other resources include the Primary Healthcare and Paediatric Hospital Level Standard Treatment Guidelines (STGs) and Essential Medicines List (EML).

SAPA advocates for heightened awareness on the safe use and storage of pesticides, and other poisons to protect our children. We encourage families, communities, and government to work together to prevent further incidents.

NB: pesticide poisoning is a notifiable medical condition. Use this link to download the app or access the web application - <https://www.nicd.ac.za/nmc-overview/notification-process/>

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