



VITALS

A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

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CDC Poisoning in the United States : Fact Sheet



The CDC defines poison as “any substance that is harmful to your body when ingested, inhaled, injected, or absorbed through the skin.” This definition does not include reactions to medications taken correctly. Poisoning may be intentional or unintentional. Intentional poisoning occurs when a person takes or gives a substance with the goal of causing harm. Obviously, a person who does not mean to cause harm can still hurt or be hurt if there is an accidental overdose, if the wrong substance is taken, or if drugs or chemicals are used for recreational purposes in excessive amounts.

In 2005 there were 32,691 poisoning deaths in the US. 72% were unintentional and 10% were of undetermined intent. Of the 18% which were intentional, 5,744 were suicides and 89 were homicides. Unintentional poisoning is second only to motor vehicle crashes as a cause of unintentional injury. By 2006, unintentional poisoning accounted for 75 deaths and 2,000 Emergency Department (ED) visits a day. Three children die each day from poisoning. About 422 poisoned kids are seen in an ED daily.

Among those who died from unintentional poisoning in 2005:

- Men were 2.1 times more likely than women
- Native Americans had the highest death rate
- Whites and Blacks had comparable rates
- Peak age was 45-49
- Lowest mortality rates were among children younger than 15

Among those who survived unintentional poisoning, men were 1.5 times more likely than women and the highest rates were in the 40-49 year old group.

Among those who committed suicide by poisoning in 2005:

- Men were 1.3 times more likely than women
- Whites were 3.6 times more likely than Blacks
- Peak age was 45-49 years old.

Among those who attempted to harm themselves with poison and survived, women were 1.6 times more likely than men. There were two age peaks 15-19 and 40-44 years old.



Suicide by poisoning usually involves psycho-active drugs, such as sedatives and antidepressants, followed by opiates and other prescription pain medications. Opioids were the most common pain relievers and benzodiazepines (for example, valium) the most common sedatives used in suicide attempts.

Poster Pointers

Stabilize Your Gurney !

“Patient Stretcher” in “Arrive Alive Do No Harm” gives some great tips to help keep control of the gurney. Unfortunately, the gurney is sometimes easier to control than the patient on it. Communication with the patient, when possible, coupled with good technique, gives us a good starting point. We must constantly observe the patient, anticipate dangerous behaviors and react to them. All patient handling techniques should be addressed in policies and procedures.