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Illinois Poison Center Encourages the Public to Celebrate Safely This Summer

IPC Offers Safety Measures to Prevent Foodborne Illnesses and Poisonings

CHICAGO – With the upcoming Memorial Day holiday marking the unofficial start to summer, the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) is encouraging Illinoisans to take precautions against poison exposures, including foodborne illness, while enjoying fun in the sun.

According to the IPC, the combination of long summer days home from school, increase in outdoor celebrations and higher prevalence of insects lead to an increase in accidental exposures.

“Summer is an exciting time to enjoy BBQs, festivals and holiday celebrations, but the festivities can be ruined because the proper precautions aren’t taken to prevent poisoning,” said IPC Medical Director, Michael Wahl, MD. “During summer months, IPC sees a 10-20 percent higher call volume than compared to the rest of the year, which includes food poisoning calls.”

FoodSafety.gov reports that food poisoning affects millions of Americans each year. There are an estimated 48 million cases of foodborne illness annually – the equivalent of sickening one in six Americans each year. Each year, these illnesses result in an estimated 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths.

“As you enjoy the many benefits of summer, IPC wants the public to be mindful of their surroundings and properly prepare and store all foods so everyone can enjoy the summer in good health,” Wahl added.

To prevent harmful exposures, the IPC offers the following tips:

- **Food Safety:** Properly prepare, cook and store food to keep bacteria at bay and prevent food poisoning.
 - Keep hot foods hot, and cold foods cold.
 - Avoid cross-contamination of raw and cooked foods.
 - Cook food as close to serving time as possible to avoid bacterial growth.
 - Refrigerate food within two hours of cooking – if you are unsure how long an item has been out, play it safe and throw it away.

- Keep coolers in the shade and out of the hot car or trunk.
- **Holiday Celebrations:** Parties are fun but present a number of opportunities for danger for both adults and children.
 - Be sure all tiki torch oils, lighter fluids, fireworks and other flammables are in their original containers, locked up and out of the reach of children. Accidentally drinking tiki torch oils or lighter fluids can be fatal.
 - Keep alcohol up and out of the reach of children.
 - Do not let children put glow sticks, fireworks, or other substances in their mouths.
 - Open and use all pool chemicals in a very well-ventilated area and wear eye and skin protection.
- **Cover Up:** Wear clothing that will cover as much exposed skin as possible in order to protect from plant poisonings, like poison ivy, or from insect bites and stings.
- **Creams and sprays:** Sunscreen and bug repellants are crucial summertime staples, but they may contain chemicals that can be harmful.
 - Read all labels and apply according to the directions.
 - Wash hands immediately after application.

For more information on summertime safety, please visit the [IPC Summer Safety](#) page.

IPC's toxicology specialists, who serve most all languages, resolve more than 90% of poison exposure cases over the phone, eliminating the need for referral to a healthcare facility. IPC staff serve as toxicology consultants to Illinois healthcare professionals, whose inquiries represent nearly one-third of yearly poisoning cases. Calls to the IPC helpline (1-800-222-1222) are free and confidential. IPC experts are available to provide information and treatment advice 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, including holidays.

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The Illinois Poison Center is a nonprofit health service that provides the people of Illinois with comprehensive and trusted information and treatment advice on potentially harmful substances via a free, confidential 24-hour helpline staffed by specially trained physicians, nurses and pharmacists.