Poisoning and Drug Overdose

Disclaimer

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Background

About poisoning and drug overdose

➢ Poisonings are a common cause of Emergency Department presentation.
➢ About half involve intentional self-harm overdoses, or recreational drug use in adults.
➢ The other group is children aged < 5 years, with accidental exposure to medications, household chemicals, or plants.
➢ Poisoning is a major cause of death in patients aged < 40 years.
➢ If a patient survives to reach hospital, mortality is < 1%, mostly due to good supportive care.

Practice point

For poisoning emergency advice, either phone 13-11-26 (Poisons Information Centre), or refer for emergency department assessment.
Management

Unwell or unstable patient

- Ring 000 for an ambulance if the poisoned or envenomed patient:
  - has collapsed.
  - stopped breathing.
  - is fitting.
  - is suffering an anaphylactic reaction.
- Start resuscitation.
- First aid may be required.
- See Emergency Department referrals.

Stable patient

- First aid may be required.
- Perform a risk assessment and collect essential information.

Information required when calling the Poisons Information Centre

- Identification of the poison – full product name with ingredients and their strength, if available. The product name can be used to examine the ingredients listed in the National Poisons Register.
- Dose or volume
- Routes
- Time of exposure
- Duration since event
- Clinical features, signs and symptoms, and their time course
- Other medications and medical history

- If suspected poisoning or overdose, seek advice from:
  - Emergency Department, who have TOXINZ.com (paid subscription) and online references available to help identify poisons and to give first aid.

Poisons Information Centre

- Phone line available all hours
- Advice is provided on a range of exposures e.g:
  - suspected poisoning
  - drug overdose
  - accidental or intentional
  - workplace exposure (chemicals)
  - household products
  - medicines and medication errors
  - bites, stings, and envenomation.
- For more complex cases, a poisons information specialist with access to a consultant clinical toxicologist will provide advice.
If overdose known or suspected:

- perform a risk assessment.
- and accidental, provide education about prevention.
- and intentional, follow the Suicide Risk pathway and manage any underlying mental illness or drug dependency.

See The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne – Recreational Drug Use and Overdose for details on the management of common drugs, party pills, and alcohol.

- Refer both children and adults to Emergency Department if required.

## Information

### For health professionals

- Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation – facts and resources on alcohol and drugs
- Australian Family Physician – Illicit Drug Overdose
- DirectLine – Victorian public alcohol and drug treatment system, phone 1800-888-236
- The Drug and Alcohol Clinical Advisory Service (DACAS), phone 1800-812-804 (all hours)
- The Royal Children’s Hospital Melbourne:
  - Guidelines for Initial Management of Acute Poisoning
  - Recreational Drug Use and Overdose
- U.S. National Library of Medicine – TOXNET Databases
- Victorian Poisons Information Centre:
  - Bites and Stings
  - First Aid

### For patients

- Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation:
  - Free factsheets and resources about alcohol and drugs
  - Overdose – factsheet
- Better Health Channel – Victorian Poisons Information Centre
- DirectLine – confidential alcohol and drug counselling and referral, phone 1800-888-236
- NSW Poisons Information Centre – Fact Sheets
- Victorian Poisons Information Centre:
  - Information Sheets – see side bar
  - Poisoning Advice Pamphlet

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