

POISONology

SAFETY & FIRST AID TIPS FROM THE ARIZONA POISON AND DRUG INFORMATION CENTER

Nicotine Warning: Swallowing can be hazardous to your health



The poison center handles calls for someone accidentally consuming nicotine about one or two times a week.

Recently we had a call from a frantic mom whose 3-year-old son was found chewing on a piece of 4 mg Nicorette gum. This case was not manageable at home so the center referred her to the local emergency room for evaluation.

Upon follow-up with the ER physician, the child had two more episodes of vomiting along with some increased salivation and rapid heart rate. After four hours of observation and supportive care, the child was symptom-free and medically cleared to go home.

Nicotine can be highly toxic, particularly in children or infants, if enough is consumed. In general, if approximately one cigarette, three cigarette butts, one cigar butt or ANY amount of nicotine gum or chew/snuff is ingested, then an ER assessment is necessary. If the closest ER is more than 10-15 minutes away, then we recommend calling 911 for an ambulance.

If what we consider a less than dangerous toxic amount is involved, then close observation at home for nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, agitation, and/or increased salivation may be all that is needed. The onset of symptoms is expected within 15-30 minutes, but may be sooner in children.

Because not everyone reacts the same to poisons, the "take home" message here is to call us right away if any form of nicotine is chewed on and/or swallowed. Let us help you make the right decision and provide you with the best information possible.

If you have other poisoning concerns or questions call the tollfree national hotline at 1-800-222-1222 to reach your local poison center. If you live in Arizona outside of Maricopa County, this number will get you to our experts at the Arizona Poison and Drug Information Center in Tucson.