Poison Centers:
Information for Mental Health Providers

What is the Poison Center?

The Poison Center is part of America's Poison Centers and includes both the Upstate New York and New York City (NYC) poison centers. The Poison Center is a medical hotline available 24/7 for intentional and unintentional exposures to potentially poisonous substances and medication safety questions (such as medication identification, side effects, medicine interactions and safe disposal). It is staffed by poison information specialists who are licensed by New York State as registered pharmacists and nurses certified in poison information.

All calls to the Poison Center are confidential and free of charge. Translation services are available in 150 languages. To contact the Poison Center, call 1-800-222-1222.

When should you (or your client or patient) call the Poison Center?

Call the Poison Center if you:

- Are concerned about a possible exposure risk or need help identifying potentially poisonous substances including chemicals, medicines, household substances, illicit drugs and plants
- Are unfamiliar with a particular substance
- Have a medicine safety question

Real-time reporting and data allow the Poison Centers to address and monitor trends and respond proactively. Poison Center specialists can provide you and your clients or patients with valuable and potentially life-saving information and resources.

In NYC, poisoning by drugs or other toxic agents is required to be reported to the NYC Poison Center under NYC Health Code Section 11.03.

What happens when I call the Poison Center?

You will be connected to a specialist who can provide free information and advice. Have the following information available when you call:

- Your name, phone number and ZIP code (in case the call gets dropped)
- The name and age of your client or patient (if known)
- The name of the substance and route of exposure
- How much of the substance was taken
- When the substance was taken
- If the client or patient has any symptoms

Even if your client or patient has no symptoms after an exposure, you should contact the Poison Center, as symptoms can be delayed.

Safety Considerations

Suicide Prevention and Means Restriction

Certain substances can be dangerous and even fatal in small amounts. If a client or patient says they have used or intend to use any of the following substances to harm themselves or others, you should consult the Poison Center:

- **Household substances** such as antifreeze, nicotine, oven cleaner, pesticides (for example, Tres Pasitos), rodenticides, preservatives (for example, sodium nitrite), toilet bowl cleaner or windshield wiper fluid
- **Medicines** such as:
  - Antipsychotic or antidepressant medicines — for example, bupropion (Wellbutrin®)
  - Over-the-counter analgesics – for example acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
  - Antimalarials — for example, chloroquine (Aralen®)
  - Cardiac medicines — for example, diltiazem (Cardizem®), nifedipine (Procardia®) or verapamil (Calan®)
  - Opioids
- **Toxic byproducts** such as carbon monoxide (from oven or car-engine combustion) or hydrogen sulfide (from mixtures of cleaning products)
- **Natural toxins** such as from poisonous plants or fungi

Suicide attempts may occur during a short-term crisis with little advance planning. Restricting access to means — the methods used for suicide — can impede a person's plan, allowing a crisis to pass, or reduce the lethality of a suicide attempt. Providers can ask clients, patients and members of their clients' and patients' households to do the following:

- Safely dispose of unused, expired, and unwanted medications, including over-the counter medications and supplements
- Restrict access to medicines, such as by using a lockbox
- Lock up or dispose of other potentially lethal household substances, such as those listed previously

For more information on reducing access to lethal means, visit:
https://hsph.harvard.edu/research/means-matter/

Medication Safety

Recommend the Poison Center to your clients and patients as another source of information for medicine safety guidance. Poison Center specialists can offer information and advice related to:

- Adverse events or side effects
- Medication interactions
- Medication errors
- Medication management
- Safe medication disposal

For more information, call 1-800-222-1222. You can visit the NYC Poison Center website at **nyc.gov/health** and search for **poison control**, and the Upstate NY Poison Center website at **upstate.edu/poison.**