

Simple rules help safety-proof spring cleaning routines

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Warmer weather often means time for spring cleaning and home improvement chores. Walls and windows get washed, lawn furniture is scrubbed, gardens are fertilized, and cars get cleaned and waxed after a long, dirty winter.

You may love the sparkling results of your hard work, but did you know that many household products can be hazardous to your health? More than 85 percent of all reported poisonings happen accidentally at home. The poisons often are ordinary, everyday cleaning products such as cleansers, polishes, and insecticides.

Young children are at special risk for accidental poisoning because they can't read labels and they often see cleaning products as something pretty to eat or drink. Most accidental poisonings to children occur while the product is in use. For example, the phone rings while you are waxing the furniture. When you go to answer it, your child gets into the furniture polish.

Following a few simple rules can go a long way in helping to poison-proof your spring cleaning routines. Start by keeping all household chemicals and cleaning products out of reach and sight of young children. Preferably, lock them up when not in use. Children usually can't be poisoned by something they can't get their hands on. Don't forget about poisonous items such as paint thinner, antifreeze, charcoal, chrome cleaner, rock salt, and pesticides in garages or storage areas.

Make the full circle of use for every product; get it out, use it, and then put it away. When products are in use, never let them out of your sight – even if you must take them along when answering the doorbell or telephone.

Make sure all potentially harmful products are stored in their original containers with the original label intact. Never store cleaning products, paint, antifreeze, or other chemicals in cups, drinking glasses, or soft drink bottles.

Read labels carefully and use products only as directed. For example, avoid mixing bleach and products containing ammonia because this combination results in the production of poisonous gas. Allow for plenty of ventilation when using paints and varnishes and other chemical products.

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