



To: Physicians, Nurses, and Other Health Care Providers in American Samoa
From: Ron Kirschner, MD
Medical Director, Nebraska Regional Poison Center
Subject: Hydrocarbon Update
Date: August 27, 2012

- The Nebraska Regional Poison Center frequently receives calls about ingestion of hydrocarbons (HCs) such as gasoline, kerosene, and lamp oil. These are often unintentional ingestions by small children.
- HCs can be derived from coal or petroleum, or be plant products such as pine oil.
- The most common clinical effects are pneumonitis from aspiration and CNS depression. More volatile HCs such as gasoline or kerosene pose the greatest risk for aspiration.
- Certain HCs can affect the liver (carbon tetrachloride), kidney (toluene), peripheral nerves (n-hexane), or cause dysrhythmias (halogenated HCs, usually following inhalational abuse).
- HCs are irritating to skin and can cause chemical burns with prolonged exposure.
 - Following exposure, contaminated clothing should be removed and exposed skin washed.
- Gastric lavage and activated charcoal are generally not recommended.
- Most patients with pulmonary effects will have signs such as coughing, wheezing, or dyspnea. Chest X-ray findings may be delayed.
 - Patients with no respiratory findings after 6-8 h are unlikely to develop pneumonitis.
 - Patients with pulmonary effects should have pulse oximetry monitored. They should be given supplemental oxygen and bronchodilators as needed.
 - Antibiotics are recommended only if bacterial superinfection is suspected, and steroids are of unproven benefit. The mainstay of treatment for HC chemical pneumonitis is supportive care.
- A complete metabolic panel is recommended following exposure to halogenated HCs, toluene, or other aromatic HCs.
- Patients with CNS depression should have cardiac monitoring, an EKG, and supplemental oxygen.

Our trained staff of nurse/physician assistant specialists in poison information and physician toxicologists is available 24 hours a day to answer your questions. In American Samoa, health care professionals and the public can reach the Poison Center by calling: 1-800-222-1222.

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