

# SAY NO TO POISONS!



**The National Poisons Information Centre, Beaumont Hospital.  
Call 01 809 2166, 8am-10pm.  
Outside these hours, contact your GP or hospital or call 999 or 112.**

## Introduction

As Director of the National Poisons Information Centre (NPIC), it is a great privilege to introduce the “Say NO to Poisons!” storybook. We receive over 4,000 enquiries every year concerning young children who have been involved in a poisoning incident. This storybook is part of an initiative to help prevent childhood poisonings and will be launched on the “National Poisons Awareness Day”. It aims to educate young children about potential poisons both inside and outside the home, and to help them understand that they should always ask an adult if something is safe to eat or drink. However, in the event of a suspected poisoning, immediate expert advice is available to parents and childcare providers by telephoning the NPIC. We can advise on what immediate treatment is necessary and in some cases prevent unnecessary attendances at Emergency Departments.

This storybook was piloted by the staff and children in County Carlow VEC Childcare Centre. I would like to thank them for all their hard work. Their excitement and enthusiasm has been inspiring. Early Childhood Ireland has endorsed this storybook and we are grateful for their input. I would like to acknowledge the support we have received from the HSE. A special thanks to Martina Osborne (Adult and Further Education Office at County Carlow VEC) who has contributed enormously to this project.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge and thank the staff of the NPIC (Patricia, Nicola, Elaine, Annette, Niamh, John and Feargal) for all their hard work in bringing this project to fruition. Nicola Cassidy deserves a special mention as it was her dedication, vision, commitment and passion that led to the creation of this storybook.

***Dr. Edel Duggan, Director of the National Poisons Information Centre, Beaumont Hospital.***

## Foreword

The HSE is delighted to support this publication from the National Poisons Information Centre. Reducing risk of harm from accidental injury is a major area of focus within child health services, and health education programmes of this kind work to provide a safer environment for our children. We hope that children, parents and care workers will all benefit from the health education messages provided as part of this programme.

***Dr. Kevin Kelleher, Head of Health Protection and Child Health, HSE.***

Early Childhood Ireland is delighted to collaborate with the National Poisons Information Centre in launching the “Say NO to Poisons!” campaign. We hope to get the message across to young children through storytelling that some things are not safe to eat or drink.

We are all aware that young children are curious and will sometimes inhale or swallow unusual and poisonous substances without realising the danger. This can be anything from household detergents to prescribed medicine. Some situations call for swift action and expert advice from the NPIC.

Through the campaign, we want children to become more aware and realise they cannot eat everything. Following simple basic safety rules will help encourage a reduction in the numbers of young children ingesting harmful or poisonous substances. That would be a positive outcome all round.

***Irene Gunning, CEO, Early Childhood Ireland.***

## Dear Childcare Professional / Parent / Guardian / Reader

Welcome to our storybook called “Say NO to Poisons!” This book was developed by the National Poisons Information Centre (NPIC), Beaumont Hospital, in collaboration with the Adult and Further Education Office at County Carlow VEC and the staff and children of the County Carlow VEC Childcare Centre, and has been endorsed by Early Childhood Ireland.

### ***Accidental poisoning is common in children.***

- Every year the NPIC receives more than 4,000 telephone enquiries about children who have been accidentally poisoned. The true incidence of accidental poisoning in children is likely to be much higher than that reported to the NPIC.
- The majority of poisoned children are under 5 years old.
- Young children are naturally curious. As they become mobile and start to explore their surroundings, they often put things in their mouths.
- Accidental poisoning occurs when harmful substances are swallowed or there is contact with the eyes or skin. Poisoning can result in serious harm, eye injuries, burns, and anxiety and distress.

This programme is designed to introduce the topic of poisons to pre-school children and to teach them about poison safety, in order to prevent poisoning accidents.

### **Say NO to Poisons!**

The book contains 2 stories: (1) What’s a poison? (2) It’s a poison!

- The aim of the book is to teach children to always ask a grown-up minding them if something is safe to eat, drink, or touch, and to re-enforce the “Say NO to Poisons!” catchphrase.
- You can encourage the children to talk about the stories and the safety messages.
- You will find additional supporting information about the relevant poison prevention messages prior to stories 1 and 2.

### **Poisons Awareness Pack**

- The “Say NO to Poisons!” book is one part of a set of materials that makes up our Poisons Awareness Pack.
- The “Say NO to Poisons!” book can be used as a stand-alone tool or in combination with the other activities.
- The Poisons Awareness Pack also contains Poison Prevention Leaflets, activity sheets, a “Say NO to Poisons!” slide show and a suggested Learning Plan for childcare professionals.
- You can download all the materials in the Poisons Awareness Pack at [www.poisons.ie](http://www.poisons.ie)
- You can order Poison Prevention Leaflets at [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)

We hope you find the “Say NO to Poisons!” book and the Poisons Awareness Pack useful.

## Story 1: What's a poison?

### Learning Messages

- Children learn never to take medicine unless it is given to them by a grown-up who is minding them.
- Children learn not to play with, touch, or try to open bottles, especially those that have the “click, click” lids.
- Children learn to always ask a grown-up minding them if something is safe to eat, drink, or touch.
- Say NO to Poisons!

### Supporting Information for Story 1

- A poison is any substance that can cause harm if it is swallowed, inhaled, or makes contact with the skin or eyes.
- All medicines are potentially poisonous to children, even if the medicine belongs to them.
- Children are frequently poisoned by taking medicine belonging to somebody else or by taking too much of their own medicine.
- Some medicines have special child-resistant closures (lids). These lids are child-resistant but they are not child-proof. Child-resistant lids are useful because they delay children from gaining access to the contents of the container.
- Some child-resistant lids make a “click, click” noise when turned. Other lids must be pushed down and turned at the same time, in order to open the lid.
- Not all medicines will be stored in child-resistant packaging.
- Some medicines are attractive to children because of their taste, appearance or packaging. Children should be taught that even if a medicine belongs to them, or if it tastes or looks nice, it can still cause harm and poison them.



**Say NO to Poisons!**

**Story 1**

**What's a poison?**



Amy is unwell.

She needs medicine to make her better.

Mammy gives Amy some medicine.



Ben wants some medicine too.

"Mammy, can I have some medicine please?"

"No Ben! Amy needs her medicine to make her better but you do not need medicine".





Mammy looks away and Ben picks up the bottle of medicine. He tries to open the bottle. "Click, click" goes the bottle.

"No!" says Mammy. "Do not touch Amy's medicine!"

Medicine is dangerous if you don't need it.

Medicine is a poison if it is not your medicine".





“What’s a poison Mammy?” asks Ben.

Mammy tells Ben that a poison can make you sick and can hurt your mouth, your eyes, or your skin.

“A poison is anything that you are not to eat, drink, or touch, unless Mammy, Daddy, or a grown-up minding you, gives it to you. Poisons are bad.”



“Some medicines and other poisons have special lids.

Some lids make a ‘click, click’ sound.

You should never touch bottles that have the special lid.

Sometimes medicine and tablets are in bottles that don’t look dangerous, so always ask if something is safe to touch.”



Ben and Amy have learned never to take medicine unless a grown-up minding them, gives it to them.

Ben and Amy have learned not to touch bottles with the special “click, click” lids.

Ben and Amy now know to always ask Mammy, Daddy, or a grown-up minding them, if something is safe to eat, drink, or touch.

Ben and Amy have learned to “Say NO to Poisons!”

## Story 2: It's a poison!

### Learning Messages

- Children learn to shout for help from a grown-up minding them if poisoning occurs.
- Children learn to always ask a grown-up minding them if something is safe to eat, drink, or touch.
- Say NO to Poisons!

### Supporting Information for Story 2

- A poison is any substance that can cause harm if it is swallowed, inhaled, or makes contact with the skin or eyes.
- Children's homes will contain many household products stored in different parts of the house. Most household products are potential poisons and some can cause serious harm to children.
- Household products should never be left open, or in reach or sight of children. It only takes seconds for a child to be poisoned, often when their parent or guardian is distracted while doing other tasks.
- Many household products smell nice and have an attractive colour. Children can confuse an open bottle with a drink.
- The signs and symptoms of poisoning can be delayed.
- The Poisons Information Centre can offer immediate advice to parents and guardians about what to do if accidental poisoning occurs.
- Some children will need to go to hospital following accidental poisoning.



**Say NO to Poisons!**

**Story 2**

**It's a poison!**

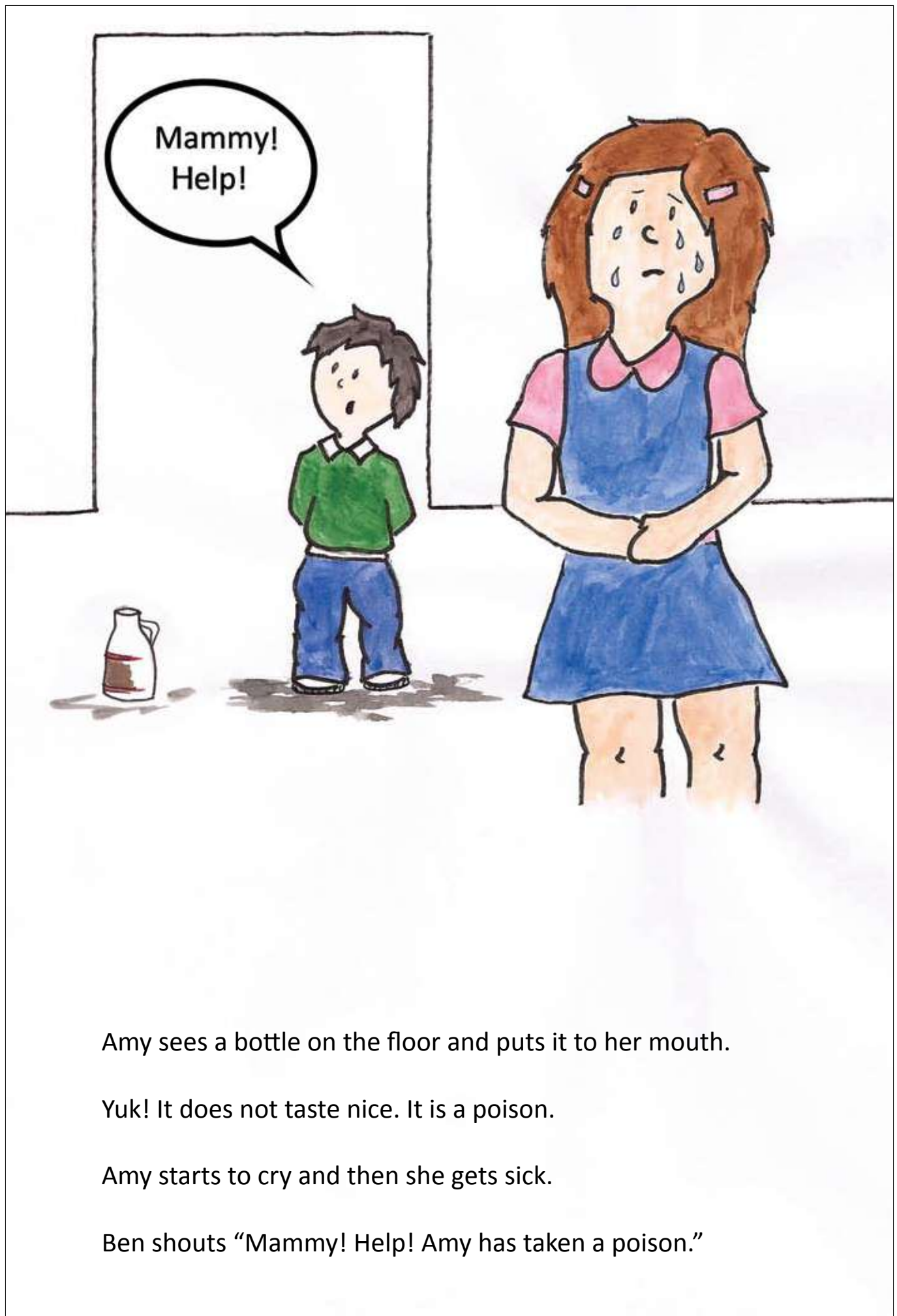


Ben and Amy are playing together.

Mammy is cleaning the kitchen.

"Ding, Dong!" There is somebody at the door.

Mammy goes to see who is there.



Amy sees a bottle on the floor and puts it to her mouth.

Yuk! It does not taste nice. It is a poison.

Amy starts to cry and then she gets sick.

Ben shouts "Mammy! Help! Amy has taken a poison."





When Mammy goes into the kitchen, Amy is getting sleepy.

Mammy calls the Poisons Centre for help.

Amy must go to hospital because she took some poison.

Ben is worried. Will Amy be ok?





At the hospital, the doctors and nurses look after Amy and make her better.

Ben is happy now that Amy is well again.

Amy now knows never to touch anything without asking a grown-up if it is safe to do so.



Ben and Amy have learned to always shout for help if somebody takes a poison.

Ben and Amy have learned to always ask Mammy, Daddy, or a grown-up minding them, if something is safe to eat, drink, or touch.

Ben and Amy have learned to “Say NO to Poisons!”

## Acknowledgements

The NPIC is especially grateful to Martina Osborne (Adult and Further Education Office, County Carlow VEC) for all her advice, guidance, helpful discussions, and enthusiasm with the development and design of the Poisons Awareness Pack materials.

Sincere thanks to the staff, parents and children of the County Carlow VEC Childcare Centre. Their participation in the first National Poisons Awareness Project and their meticulous appraisal and constructive feedback about the materials has been invaluable.

Special thanks to Louise Osborne for her wonderful illustrations that brought Ben and Amy to life!

Thanks to our HSE colleagues: Dr. Kevin Kelleher, Rosaleen Harlin, Katherine Cregan and Fidelma Browne who have graciously supported and funded this storybook.

Thanks also to Brenda Shannon (Public Health/Population Health Directorate, HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster) and to Grainne Dowdall (Child Health Information Centre Coordinator, Temple Street Hospital) for their helpful suggestions.

Finally, the NPIC would like to gratefully acknowledge the involvement of Early Childhood Ireland, especially Irene Gunning CEO, Teresa Heeney, Marlene McCormack and Marion Brennan. We are especially delighted that ECI have given their endorsement to our book "Say NO to Poisons!"





# LEARNING PLAN

Download the activities at [www.poisons.ie](http://www.poisons.ie)

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