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Being Safe at Home

Earlier this summer, I traveled to Houston, TX for the national meeting of the Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS). This meeting is packed with sessions on current research and issues affecting families in a variety of ways. One of the sessions I attended brought to light a danger in the home that I had not realized before regarding the use of single-load liquid laundry packets. I first noticed these unique packets come on the market several years ago because their shape and color caught my eye. They are about the size of a Ping-Pong ball and have brightly colored detergent (laundry or dishwasher) packed tightly into a thin plastic packaging. In retrospect, I can see now why these pose a potential problem in the home – especially for young children who may see the bright powdery colors and think they may be candy or some other sweet treat.

The single-load liquid laundry packets have become more popular in recent year as consumers have found them to be effective, easy, and convenient for cleaning their laundry. However, it is important to recognize that the content of these packets, like many other common household cleaning products, can be dangerous if ingested. The highly concentrated nature of these detergents requires that we take caution when handling, storing, and using them in our homes. In fact, the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) reports that, in the first six months of this year alone, reports of 5,753 children age 5 and under have been exposed to laundry detergent packets.

With the more traditional laundry products, children would commonly experience an upset stomach, if they had any symptoms at all. However, with the highly concentrated nature of the laundry pods, the symptoms children experience are often more extreme with excessive vomiting. Additional reactions to ingestion have included wheezing, gasping, and becoming sleepy. There have been some cases where

the breathing problems were so extensive that the child needed a ventilator to help them breathe.

Some cases report that the child has shown corneal abrasions (scratches to the eyes) from getting the laundry by or near their eyes.

The American Cleaning Institute provided an awareness campaign at the Houston meeting about the danger of laundry packets and measures parents and guardians can take to prevent this situation in our homes. Preventative measures you can take in your home to guard against this danger include: Keep your detergents locked up in high, out of reach places from children; heed the cautions on the product label and packaging; keep the local poison control number (1-800-222-1212) easily accessible by your home phones or program the number into your cellular phone.

In response to the cases of poisoning in children from laundry packets, Proctor and Gamble announced on July 11, 2013 that they have redesigned their packaging of Tide Pods**, their single-load highly concentrated laundry detergent packets. It is likely that other companies manufacturing similar products will make changes, as well.

While this is a responsible and commendable response from Proctor and Gamble, it doesn't remove the responsibilities of parents and guardians to make the homes a safe environment for children to grow, learn, and explore in.

Additional home products that should be locked up out of the reach of children include (but are not limited to): bathroom products (toilet bowl cleaner, hair relaxer, mouthwash, nail polish, medicines); kitchen products (oven cleaner, drain opener, furniture polish); and products commonly stored in the garage (pesticides, rust remover, paint thinner, antifreeze, windshield washer fluid.)

Here are 10 additional proactive steps you can take to day to make your home a safer living environment for you and those who live with you:

Top 10 Home Safety Tips

1. Install smoke alarms on every level of your home and outside every sleeping area. Test them monthly. Smoke alarms that are ten years old or more should be replaced. If you build or remodel your home, install fire sprinklers.
2. Develop a fire escape plan for your family: Point out two exits from each room, pick a meeting spot outside, and hold a fire drill at least twice a year.
3. Always stay in the kitchen while food is cooking on the stove. Keep handles of pot and pans pointed inward on the stove so that a child cannot grab them and so they don't get caught on loose-fitting clothes.
4. Keep all stairways, paths, and walkways well lit. Use railings.
5. Install grab bars in bath and shower stalls, and use a non-slip mat or adhesive safety strips inside bathtubs and showers.
6. Post the National Poison Control Hotline number (1-800-222-1212) and other emergency numbers next to every phone in your home.
7. Install child locks on all cabinets used to store dangerous items such as poisons, matches, and lighters. Install carbon monoxide alarms.
8. Keep your water heater setting at 120°F or less.
9. Install four-sided pool fencing with self-locking and self-closing gates. Fencing should completely isolate the pool from the home and be at least five feet high.
10. Constantly supervise children in or near bodies of water such as pools, ponds, bathtubs, toilets, and buckets.

Being proactive is critical to home safety. Making the changes needed now rather than waiting until after an accident occurs will help protect everyone from these dangers.

*** Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.*