



**WHO CALLED THE BLUE RIDGE POISON CENTER?**

In 2012, the BRPC received 28,944 calls. Most of those calls came from the general public. However, nurses, doctors, and other health care professionals used the poison center too. In fact, 20% of our calls came from a health care professional who needed advice in treating their own patient (table 1).

Healthcare Provider	# of calls
Hospital (including free standing EDs)	4530
First Responder (fire, police, EMS, etc.)	427
School or Workplace Nurse	421
Clinic/Outpatient Facility	158
Assisted Living/Chronic Care Facility	124
Mental Health Facility	30
Pharmacist	16

Table 1: Calls from Health Care Professionals



Scott Wiley, a nurse with over 25 years of experience, answers calls at the BRPC

**WHY DID PEOPLE CALL THE POISON CENTER?**

Most calls (64%) related to an *unintentional* poisoning...in other words, an accidental exposure to something potentially harmful (figure 1). A smaller number (12%) of the calls were about an *intentional* poisoning, including suicide gestures and the misuse or abuse of a substance. An additional 19% of our calls were from people simply seeking information. The poison center experts are happy to answer questions about poisons or poison safety any time.

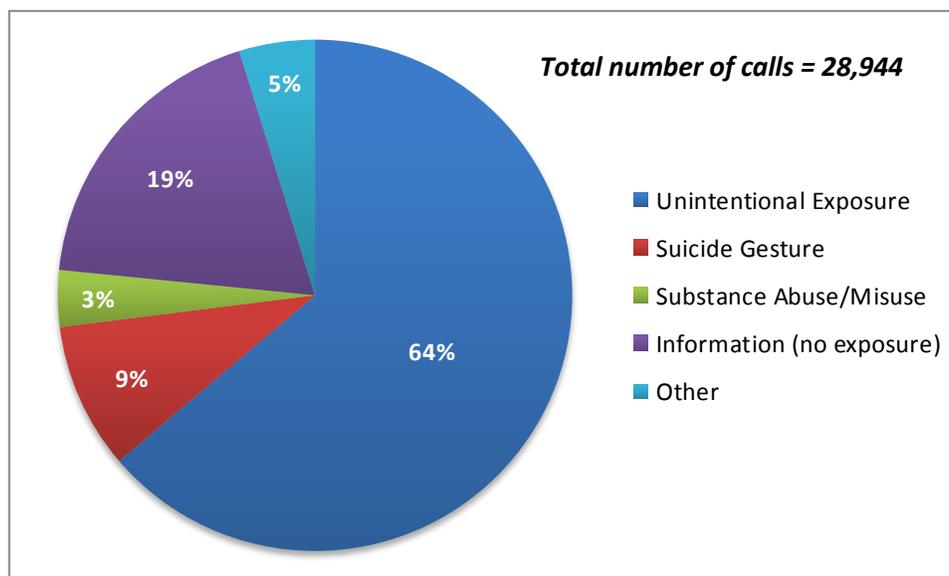


Figure 1: Reason for Call

Here are some examples of questions that people asked our experts in 2012:

- *I just broke a flurescent light bulb. I've heard they contain mercury. Can the mercury make me sick? If so, how can I protect myself while I clean up the mess?*
- *My doctor just prescribed a new medicine. I forgot to tell her that I take ginkgo biloba supplements. Can I take these together?*
- *Someone gave me a Christmas cactus as a gift. I have a 2 year old. Is this plant poisonous?*

**THE POISON CENTER IS JUST FOR CHILDREN...RIGHT?**



Young children don't know what is safe to eat or touch. They naturally put things in their mouth, their eyes, or on their skin as they play and explore their environment. Almost half of our calls are about children under the age of 6 (figure 3). That is a lot of calls! However, older children, teens, and adults get poisoned too. In fact, adults are more likely than children or teens to suffer serious health effects or to die from their poison exposure (figure 2).

Poisoning is a serious health issue that affects every age. However when the poison center is contacted, most poisoning victims recover with minor or no health effects at all (figure 2).

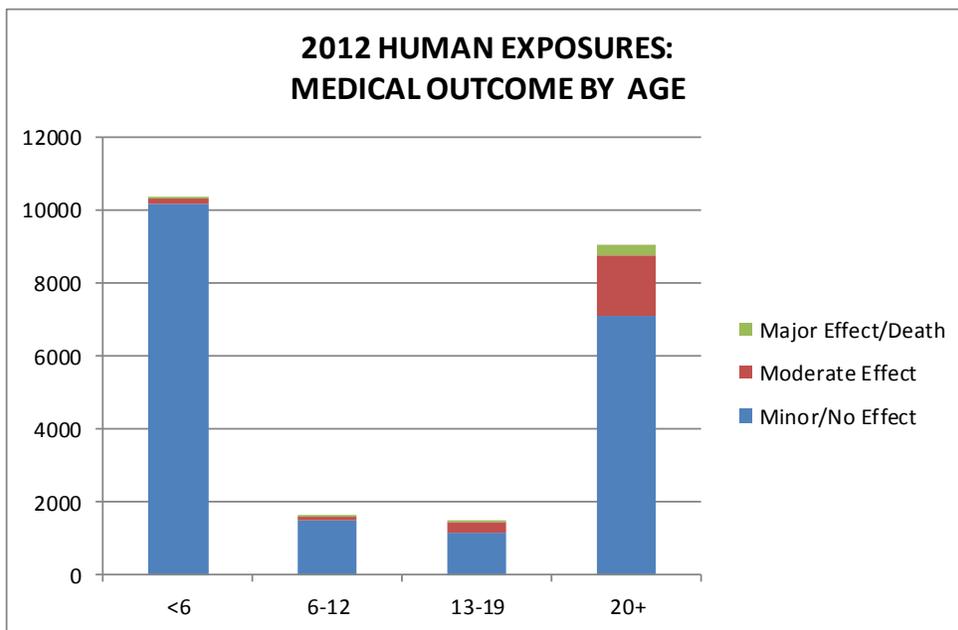


Figure 2: Human Poison Exposures—Medical Outcome by Age

Here are some examples of calls about potentially serious exposures we received in 2012:

- *An elderly couple needed emergency care when they they took each other's prescribed medicines by mistake.*
- *A mother discovered her toddler crying after he had smeared his grandparent's muscle pain relief cream all over his face and in his eyes.*
- *A man was nauseous after he drank a cleaning product that his wife stored in an old soda bottle.*

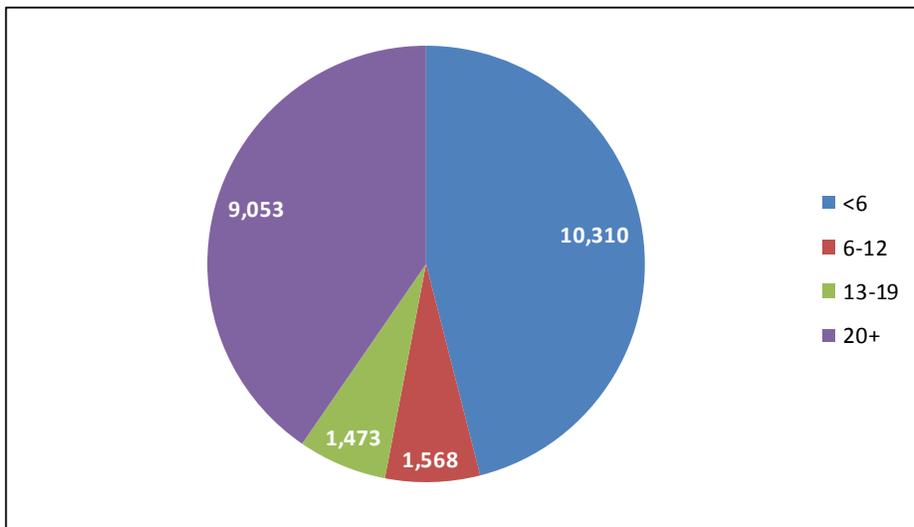


Figure 3: Human Poison Exposures—Age of Patient

**WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON POISONS?**

Any substance can be poisonous if you are exposed to too much or in the wrong way. Though rare, people have even been poisoned from swallowing too much water. (The amount needed to endanger your health is much more than you would drink because you are thirsty.) The **number one source of poisoning is medicine** of all kinds: prescription and over-the-counter. The tables below list the top ten drugs (figure 4) and the top ten non-drug substances (figure 5) that resulted in a poisoning in 2012.



The number one mistake that callers made with their medicines was accidentally taking it twice, or “double dosing.” The substance that resulted in the *most poisoning deaths* was analgesics, or pain killers.

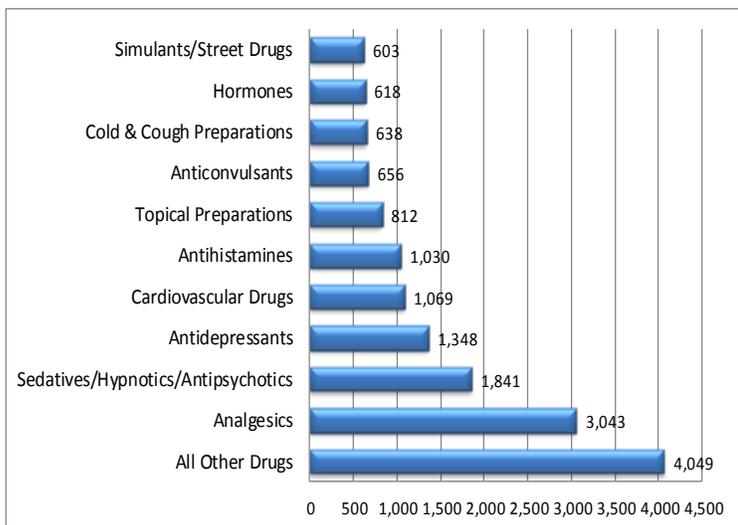


Figure 4: Sources of Poisoning—Top Ten Drugs

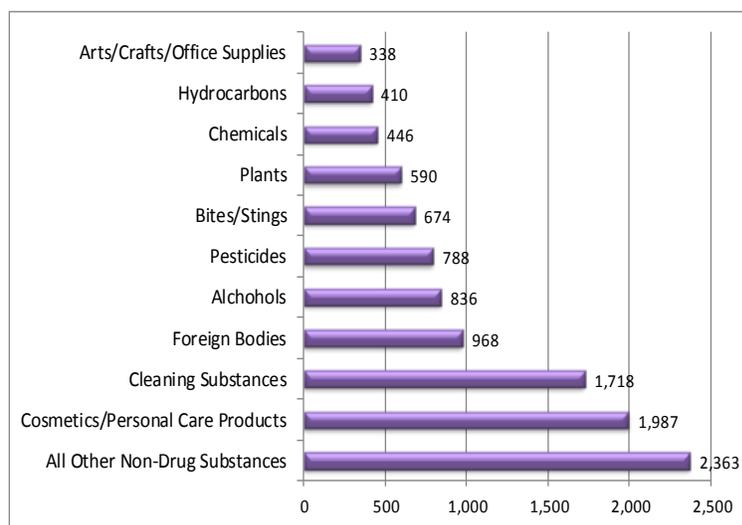


Figure 5: Sources of Poisoning—Top Ten Non-Drug Substances

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

The BRPC has a public health educator on staff who teaches poisoning prevention to people of all ages. In 2012, the Educator travelled to address 36 different audiences throughout the BRPC region, visited or supplied materials for 37 health fairs, and provided information and training to an additional 25 individuals who then spoke on our behalf about poisoning prevention in their own agencies or communities. Collectively, 13,616 people benefitted from a poisoning prevention program in the BRPC region.



The Blue Ridge Poison Center responds when possible to requests for information or interviews from media sources of all kinds. In 2012, there were 43 news items produced featuring BRPC staff, including radio interviews, television appearances, newspaper and magazine articles, and internet-based media reports.

*Left picture: Educator Kristin Wenger shows NBC 29's Sharon Gregory some dangerous new products during the news station's "House Call" health segment.*

The BRPC also distributed over 285,000 free items which display the toll-free number throughout the region. These items include stickers, refrigerator magnets, wallet cards (*image at right*), posters, and greeting cards for new parents. Items are frequently requested in bulk by schools, pharmacies, clinics, and other agencies who then distribute them to their own clients or patients.



The Public Health Educator edited and released 4 issues of *The Antidote*, a free newsletter for the general public, and tweeted poison prevention tips throughout the year. [Follow us #blueridgepoison.] Archived issues of the newsletter and more safety information are available on the website: [www.brpc.virginia.edu](http://www.brpc.virginia.edu).

The Blue Ridge Poison Center's medical toxicologists teach other health care professionals how to care for their own poisoned patients. In 2012, over 100 medical residents and students of medicine, nursing, or pharmacy benefitted from a professional education program. The BRPC produces a free monthly newsletter—*ToxTalks*—for health care professionals. Archived issues and more information are available on the University of Virginia [Department of Medical Toxicology website](#).



*Picture at right: BRPC Medical Director Christopher Holstege, MD (standing), and medical residents during toxicology rotation grand rounds.*