

...pioneering the path to poison prevention in Georgia



Georgia Poison Center  
Annual Report  
2008



## A Message From The Directors

The Georgia Poison Center takes pride in playing a pivotal role in the delivery of health care in our State. Educating the public, managing poisonings, and saving lives are tasks we don't take lightly. The residents of Georgia entrust us to deliver expert advice in a timely and cost efficient manner.

Without the tireless efforts of our specially trained nurses, pharmacists, physicians, educators, toxicologists, and support staff, providing a poison hot-line service to all 159 counties and over 9 million residents in Georgia would be impossible. It is this team approach that hopefully results in reducing human and animal poisonings, improving patient outcomes and decreasing unnecessary use of health care resources. To further illustrate this point, recent published data has shown that for every dollar spent on poison center services, a cost savings of over sixteen dollars in unnecessary health care expenditures is realized. Using those figures, in 2008, the Georgia Poison Center saved an estimated \$64 million in health care costs by treating poison victims at the site of exposure rather than in an emergency room or doctor's office.

As we enter our fourth decade of providing life-saving services to the residents of Georgia, our relationships with our key partners are stronger than ever. Georgia's Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health has been steadfast in their financial and programmatic support of our operations. The Grady Health System, which has been the home of the poison center since it was founded, has been unwavering in its support of center services. And recently, the Federal government has provided funding for the national toll-free number along with much needed financial support to centers across the nation, which we hope continues for a long time.

Despite these efforts, funding uncertainties remain the primary concern facing poison centers nation wide. Overcoming this challenge will not be an easy task. We must maintain our alliances and seek new opportunities and partnerships. We must not allow our numerous cases of saving lives and saving money to fall on deaf ears. If we are successful, we will continue to pioneer the path to poison prevention in Georgia and the rest of the nation.



Gaylord P. Lopez, PharmD, DABAT  
Director



Robert J. Geller, MD, FAAP, FACMT  
Medical Director



## Holding your hand...

The Georgia Poison Center is committed to providing quality poison center services to health care professionals and residents of Georgia. It is our goal to ensure the provision of prompt and accurate poison information to those who access our services. We continuously strive to:

- Educate residents of Georgia in the areas of poison prevention and first-aid.
- Educate health-care professionals in the areas of clinical toxicology, poisoning epidemiology, poison prevention, toxicological diagnosis and care.
- Provide stable and continuous delivery of quality poison center services to Georgians.

As one of the busiest poison centers in the country and the only one in Georgia, we receive calls daily ranging from physicians and emergency medical personnel to concerned parents. We are staffed by highly skilled physicians, pharmacists, nurses, and other poison experts 24 hours a day, 365 days a year who offer confidential advice on poison diagnosis, treatment, and information.

In 2008, the Georgia Poison Center handled 114,181 incoming calls involving poison emergencies and information. Of these calls:

- 85,211 calls were due to a human poison exposure.
- 16,865 calls were received from healthcare facilities, including hospitals, emergency medical personnel, and doctor offices.
- 8,197 calls were due to an animal poison exposure.
- 20,773 calls were for general poison information.
- 83 percent of poison exposures were successfully treated at home without the patient being referred to a healthcare facility.
- Over 51 percent of calls involved children under the age of 5.
- 56,039 follow-up calls were made to concerned parents, grandparents and health care providers

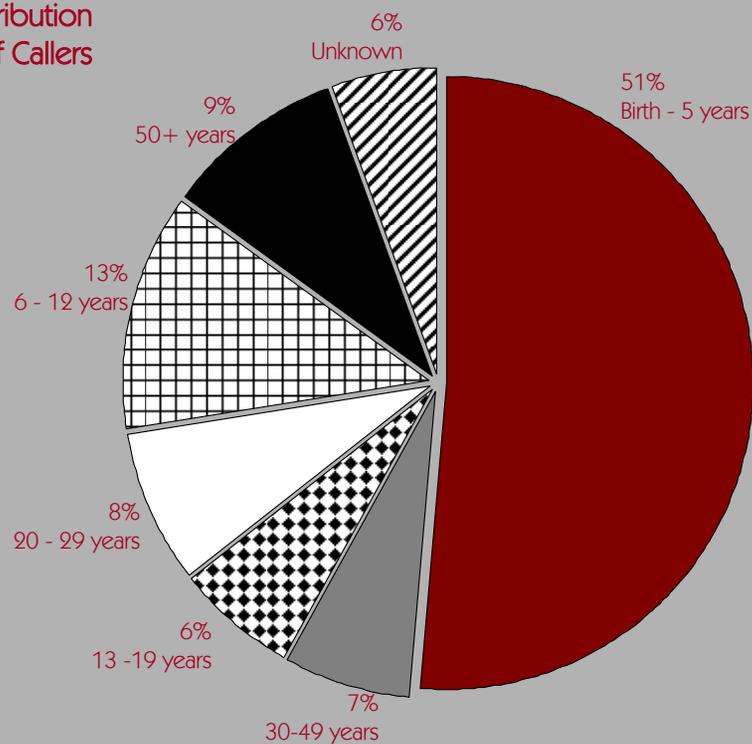
#### Top Ten Substances involved in Human Poisonings

Analgesics (pain relievers)  
Cosmetics/personal care products  
Household cleaning substances  
Sedative/hypnotics/antipsychotics  
Bites and envenomations  
Foreign bodies/toys/miscellaneous  
Cold and cough preparations  
Topical preparations  
Antihistamines  
Pesticides

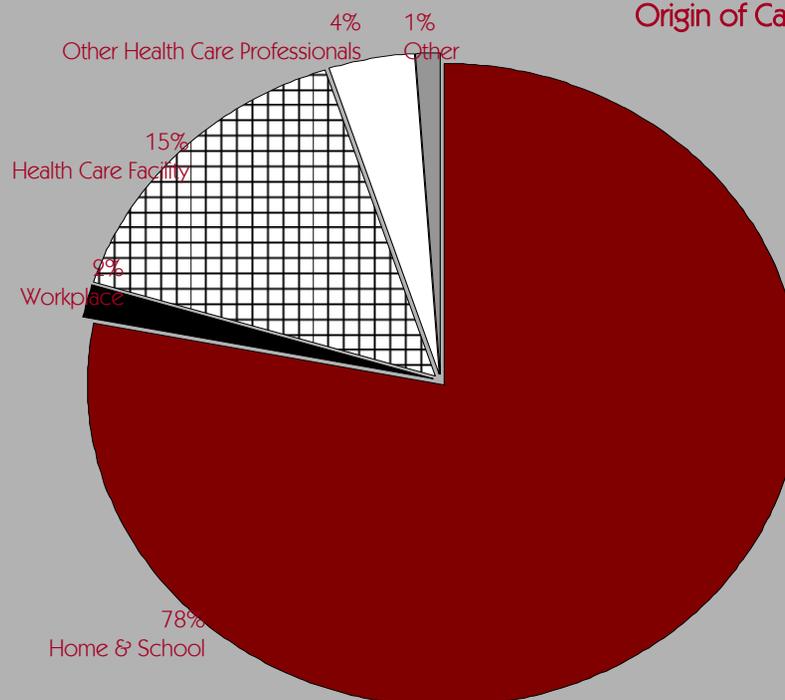
**...through poison emergencies**

The Georgia Poison Center operates as a part of the Grady Health System. The center receives its medical supervision from the faculty of the Department of Pediatrics and the Department of Emergency Medicine of Emory University School of Medicine. The Georgia Poison Center's calls are handled by a dedicated group of staff including nurses, pharmacists, and physicians, all of whom have advanced training in handling poison concerns. The Georgia Poison Center's board certified toxicologists, medical toxicology fellows and medical residents also offer specialized in-patient consultation services. All staff, including our health educators, computer specialists, and administrative support teams, work together tirelessly to provide these invaluable health care services to all Georgians.

Age Distribution of Callers

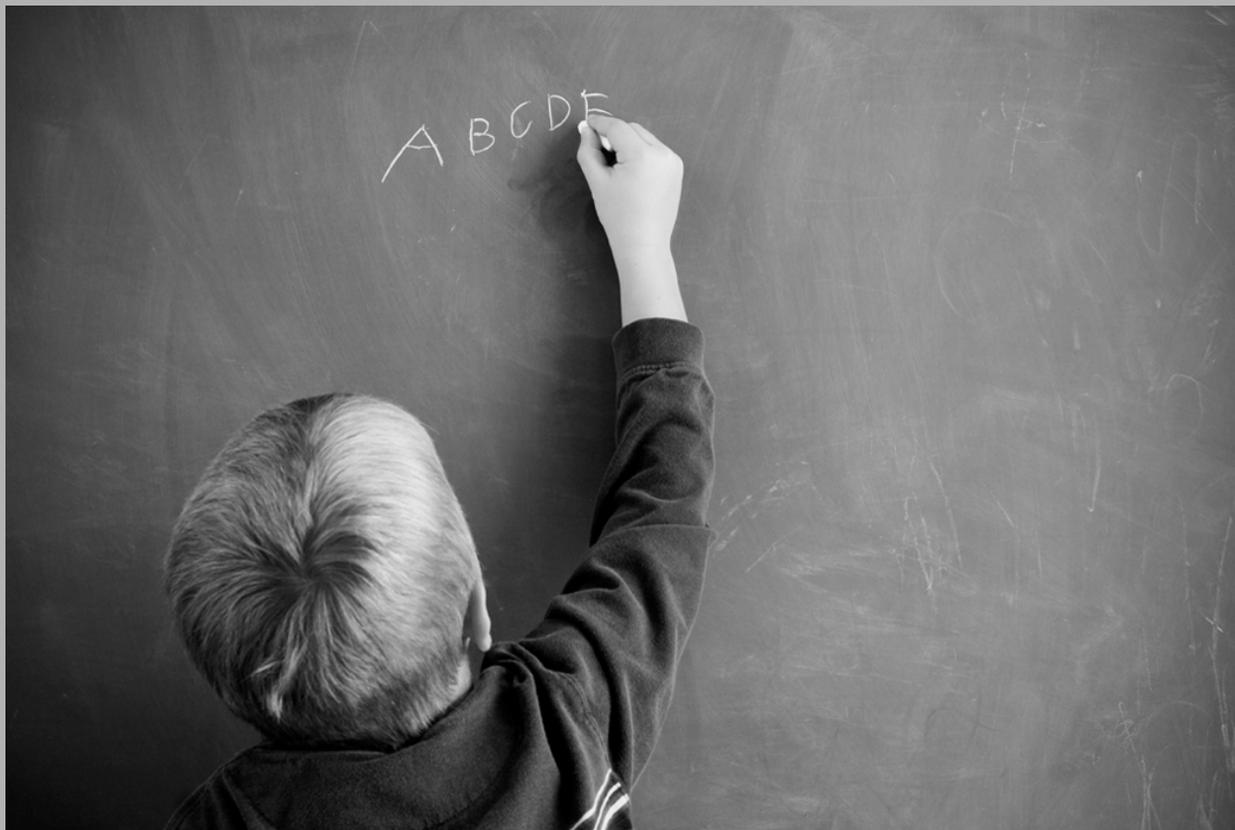


Origin of Call



Saving lives...





The Georgia Poison Center is a training site for health care professionals. Emergency Medicine and Pediatric Residents from Emory University's School of Medicine train at the Georgia Poison Center on an ongoing basis. During their training, these residents have the opportunity to see how a poison center operates, become familiar with the resources that are available in the center, and also assist in consulting on poisoned patients admitted to local health care facilities. Fourth year Pharmacy students from

Mercer University, University of Georgia, and the University of the South are also trained at the Georgia Poison Center. Students are introduced to the topic of clinical toxicology through one-on-one tutorials and hands-on activities with the guidance of toxicologists and certified Specialists in Poison Information.

The Georgia Poison Center also provides Emergency Preparedness Training for physicians, nurses, paramedics, pharmacists, and other health-care professionals who are first-responders to hazardous incidents. Classes offered include Advanced Hazmat Life Support (AHLS), which is a comprehensive training program for healthcare professionals to provide the critical skills needed to treat victims exposed to toxic substances and Blast Injury Training, a one day course providing the latest clinical information regarding blast-related injuries from terrorism.

**Training professionals...**

The Georgia Poison Center's Education Department coordinates statewide activities to increase awareness of the dangers of poisons. They provide materials and technical assistance to organizations who wish to conduct poison prevention activities in their communities. In 2008, the education department, along with Specialists in Poison Information, conducted **52 Health Fairs** across the state of Georgia. During the last quarter of 2008, the education department reinstated **The Poison Prevention Instructor Training Program (ITP)**, which equips safety advocates with the knowledge, skills, and resources to teach poison prevention activities in their respective communities. This effort increases the number of Georgians reached with poison prevention education. We believe that our collaborative efforts will encourage Georgians to adopt safe and healthy poison prevention habits. Between October and November 2008, the education department trained **34 poison prevention instructors** through the ITP program.

During the third week in March, the Georgia Poison Center celebrates **National Poison Prevention Week (NPPW)**. The Georgia Poison Center coordinates poison prevention activities throughout the state of Georgia, in collaboration with pharmacies, hospitals, schools, child care providers and other agencies concerned with the health and safety of their communities. Our educators visited new mothers at local healthcare facilities and supplied them with poison prevention information to decrease the incidence of poisonings in children. We also teamed up with the Department of Multicultural Affairs at Grady Memorial Hospital to increase poison prevention awareness among Hispanic communities. The culmination of NPPW is the annual poster contest which highlights elementary school aged children who illustrate, through artwork, poison prevention awareness. The winners are recognized at an awards ceremony held in Atlanta, GA.

**...and educating the community**



In 2008, over 50% of exposure calls received by the Georgia Poison Center involved children under the age of 6. Because the number of poisonings among this age group are so vast, the Georgia Poison Center makes great efforts to inform parents of poison prevention measures. Annually, the Georgia Poison Center participates in the American Baby Faire, targeting new and expectant families with the importance of poison prevention. This year, we equipped over 2,500 families with prevention materials, including brochures, magnets, medicine droppers, and invaluable advice from our expert staff who were on hand to answer questions and concerns.

**Caring for the young...**

“My wife told me via telephone what had possibly happened to my son. Due to the commitments that I had, I prayed that he would be okay and by the grace of God he was. She also shared with me that you called later to check on him before your day was done. I want to let you know that you made my day. For you to take the time out of your day to revisit an earlier phone call was really special. I wanted to say thank you!”

~Father of 22 month old  
Liquid Candle ingestion

#### Top Ten Substances Involved in exposures for children younger than 6 years

- Cosmetics/personal care products
- Household cleaning substances
- Analgesics (pain relievers)
- Foreign bodies/toys/miscellaneous
- Topical preparations
- Cold and cough preparations
- Antihistamines
- Vitamins
- Pesticides
- Plants



According to the latest report from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, poisoning was the fifth leading cause of death in persons 60 years of age and older. In 2008, the Georgia Poison Center received **over 700 calls** involving victims **over 60 years of age** who inadvertently took the wrong medication, took the same medication twice, or who were confused about the medication dosage. Clearly, both prescription and over-the-counter medicines play vital roles in recovery when we are sick or hurt, but beware - they can be poisonous if taken in excess or if used in a manner not indicated.

#### To prevent medicinal poisoning always...

- Follow directions on the label when you give or take medicines.
- Read all warning labels. Some medicines may interact negatively with your current medications and/or alcohol.
- Turn on a light when you give or take medicines at night; never give or take medicines in the dark.
- Keep medicines in their original bottles or containers.
- Never share or sell your prescription drugs.

**...and the young at heart**



According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, unintentional poisonings now represent the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for Americans. Based on the most recent reports, poisonings are also the leading cause for unintentional injury deaths among 35-54 year olds, higher than motor vehicle deaths. In 2008, the Georgia Poison Center was able to effectively triage over 69% of exposures in this same age group at the caller's site. By providing free and timely advice to those who access our service, callers can get back to more important things...their life.

**Taking poisoning off your mind now...**



The Georgia Poison Center is involved in a number of ongoing research projects involving epidemiology, diagnosis, management and prevention of poisonings. We utilize state-of-the-art technology to better assess each exposure and provide real time information, while understanding the nature of each poison exposure as it occurs. We believe that, with continuing support from Federal and State government entities, local health care facilities, physicians, nurses, pharmacists, emergency medical personnel, and the residents of Georgia, we will continue our path to poison prevention in Georgia well into the future.

**...and in the future**



## Did You Know...

The Georgia Poison Center, in association with the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health, Epidemiology and Prevention Branch, is the official statewide resource for the provision of protocol-driven treatment and prevention advice for animal bites and rabies exposures.

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