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## ***Illinois Poison Center Celebrates 70 Years of Saving Lives***

**CHICAGO** – The Illinois Poison Center (IPC), the nation’s first poison center, is celebrating 70 years of protecting the health and safety of Illinoisans. Located in Chicago, IPC was established in 1953 in response to a growing number of pediatric poisonings, which were driven by the increased production of chemicals, drugs and household products that followed World War II.

Today, IPC serves almost 13 million Illinois residents, the largest single population of any poison center in the country, and manages approximately 80,000 cases annually. In 2022, more than 20,000 cases came from hospitals, where medical professionals turned to IPC for specialized consultation services for patients. Poisonings managed by IPC range from minor to severe, and can occur after exposure to medication, plants, household chemicals, automotive products, insect stings, lead, carbon monoxide and more.

IPC’s expert staff - comprised of specially trained pharmacists, nurses and physicians - provides free, confidential treatment advice and information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. A proclamation by Governor JB Pritzker commemorating IPC’s 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary and recognizing the achievements of IPC’s “dedicated workers, past and present” can be found [here](#).

“We are proud of the work we are doing to prevent poisonings, provide emergency treatment advice, saves lives and reduce healthcare costs across the state,” said IPC Medical Director Michael Wahl, M.D. “Over the years, IPC has managed millions of poisoning exposure and information cases, provided intensive toxicology training for thousands of Illinois student healthcare professionals, and educated the public on how to prevent exposures to potentially harmful substances.”

Since 2000, IPC has managed more than 2 million exposure and information cases, including more than 820,000 cases involving children 5 and under. IPC data shows among the exposure cases, 79% were unintentional and approximately 18% were attributed to intentional exposures led by suicidal intent. As a result of IPC’s work within this timeframe, it is estimated nearly \$1 billion of unnecessary healthcare was prevented.

In 2005, IPC launched its free Poison Prevention Education Course. More than 30,000 individuals from all 102 Illinois counties have completed the course so far. IPC staff have also held more than 22,000 public education events, reaching more than 2.8 million Illinois residents since 2005. IPC’s “My Child Ate...” online resource, which launched in 2012, has received more than 3.5 million views.

Over the years, IPC has also been instrumental in ensuring the safety of Illinoisans during various public health emergencies, including the nationwide panic following deaths associated with Tylenol contaminated with cyanide in 1982, the emergence of synthetic drugs, threats of bioterrorism after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, the H1N1 influenza outbreak in 2009, and many other national and local incidents.

IPC staff and medical toxicologists have co-authored [innovative studies](#). Earlier this year, IPC research and data were included in a [study](#) titled, “Pediatric Edible Cannabis Exposures and Acute Toxicity: 2017–2021,” which analyzed National Poison Data System data for pediatric exposures to edible cannabis products in children ages 5 and younger between 2017 - 2021.

Calls to the IPC helpline (1-800-222-1222) are free and confidential. IPC experts are available to provide information and treatment advice 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, including holidays. To visit IPC’s website, [click here](#).

### **History & Background**

In the 1950s, when managing a poisoning, many healthcare professionals turned to Louis Gdalman, director of the pharmacy at then-known St. Luke’s Hospital in Chicago. Gdalman had developed a national reputation as an expert in managing acute and chronic poisoning, and he put this knowledge to use, answering questions from healthcare providers at any hour, day or night.

In 1953, Gdalman, in conjunction with the American Academy of Pediatrics, leveraged this expertise to establish the first poison center in the U.S. That operation has grown from a single phone at St. Luke’s into today’s Illinois Poison Center (IPC), which serves almost 13 million Illinois residents. Along with the medical science, IPC’s role, structure and services have expanded dramatically in the succeeding 70 years. However, its mission remains the same: reducing the incidence and injury of poisoning in Illinois.

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*The Illinois Poison Center is a nonprofit health service that provides the people of Illinois with comprehensive and trusted information and treatment advice on potentially harmful substances via a free, confidential 24-hour helpline staffed by specially trained physicians, nurses and pharmacists.*