



You are the Provider

You are dispatched for a possible overdose. Upon arrival you find a 16-year-old girl lying on her back. Her mother tells you that she has been depressed lately. The mother tells you that her daughter's pills are gone and that it is possible that her daughter may have taken them. This scenario will help you manage those difficult and challenging situations involving poisons and overdoses. Answer the following question.

What is your primary responsibility as an EMS provider in this situation?

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Series Editor: Andrew N. Pollak, MD, FAAOS

- How much did you ingest?
- What actions have been taken before EMS arrival?
- How much do you weigh?

Understanding the nature of the poison. Objects at the scene may provide clues: an empty bottle, needle or syringe, scattered pills, chemicals, even an overturned or damaged plant. The remains of any nearby food or drink may also be important. Place any "suspicious" material in a plastic bag, and take it to the hospital, along with any containers you find.

Containers can provide critical information. In addition to the name and concentration of the drug, a pill bottle label may list specific ingredients, the number of pills that were originally in the bottle, the name of the manufacturer, and the dose that was prescribed. This information can help emergency department physicians determine how much has been ingested and what specific treatment may be required. For certain food poisonings, a food container that lists the name and location of the maker or the vendor may be of equal importance.

✱ EMT-I Tips

Poison Centers

There are several hundred poison centers in the United States. The phone number of your local poison center is typically found on the inside cover of your local phone book. The telephone number for the National Poison Control Center is 1-800-222-1222. Staff members at every center have access to information about virtually all of the commonly used medications, chemicals, and substances that could possibly be poisonous. They know the appropriate emergency treatment for each, including the antidote, if there is one. An antidote is a substance that will counteract the effects of a particular poison.

If you believe that a patient has been poisoned, you should immediately provide medical control with all relevant information: when the poisoning occurred; a description of the suspected poison, including the amount involved; and the patient's size, weight, and age. If necessary, medical control can contact the regional poison center and relay specific instructions back to you.

A medical toxicologist is a physician who specializes in caring for patients who have been poisoned. About 100 of these specialists work in specialty hospitals called medical toxicology treatment centers, located throughout the United States. At times, your medical control may divert a patient who meets certain poisoning criteria to one of these centers instead of to the closest hospital.

You and your medical control center should know the telephone number of your regional poison center and have it available in case you respond to a call for a poisoning.

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Part 2

As you begin your initial assessment of the patient, you note the following:

Initial Assessment	Recording Time: Zero Minutes
Appearance	Pale
Level of consciousness	Responds appropriately to painful stimuli
Airway	Open; breathing loudly
Breathing	Respirations, slow and deep
Circulation	Radial pulses, slow; skin, warm and dry to touch

2. What is the first treatment priority for this patient?
3. What are some of the ways that poisons can enter the body?