

I have a patient that just ingested some boric acid. What do I do?

This is a common question that we get from either mother at home or a health care provider in the emergency room. Boric acid is most known as its use as a pesticide but is also used in medicated powders, laundry and cleaning products. The most common places I have seen it while working at the poison center are Terro Liquid Ant Baits, Harris Famous Roach Tablets and 20 Mule Team's Borax Detergent Booster. Families that try and construct their own laundry detergents with 100% boric acid should be careful with children in the household. This goes to show that just because it is homemade doesn't necessarily mean it is safer. Products that contain boric acid have been registered for use in the United States since 1948.

A single acute ingestion rarely results in systemic toxicity unless a massive amount is taken. In general, if gastrointestinal distress is absent 4 hours after a single acute ingestion then toxicity is unlikely. We see more severe toxicity after multiple exposures over several days. Earliest symptom is gastroenteritis with characteristic blue-green emesis and diarrhea and abdominal pain. Dehydration and renal failure may follow. In severe toxicities it is possible for more neurological effects with lethargy, irritability, seizures, coma and cardiovascular collapse. One other characteristic is a "boiled lobster rash" on palms and soles. There is not much of a role for decontamination of product and treatment is symptomatic and supportive. Hemodialysis can be used for massive overdoses or when patient go into renal failure.

Consumers should always follow label instructions and take steps to minimize exposure. Keep product out of reach of children. If any exposures occur, be sure to follow the First Aid instructions on the product label carefully. For additional treatment advice, contact the Poison Center at 800-222-1222.

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Oklahoma Center for Poison and Drug Information