

Using Poison Control Data to Track Hazardous Exposures Among Veterinary and Animal Care Workers

The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH), Occupational Health Surveillance (OHS) Unit, uses NJ Poison Center data to track work-related poisonings.

The Challenge

Veterinarian and animal care workers can be at increased risk for adverse health effects for both short-term and chronic exposures due to improper handling of hazardous substances, including hazardous drugs and pesticides. Hazardous chemicals in veterinary medicine include any cleaning product, medications, anesthetic gases, or other substances that veterinary staff are exposed to while working. Exposure to these chemicals might occur through inhalation, absorption through the skin, accidental ingestion, or splashes to the eyes, nose, or skin.



In reviewing the NJ Poison Center's data, between 2018-2022, OHS staff identified 30 cases of exposures to cleaners/disinfectants (23%) and hazardous drugs (70%) reported among veterinary health staff.

The Response

Through a partnership with the NJ Poison Center (also known as NJ Poison Information and Education System, NJPIES), the OHS Unit receives workplace poisoning data. One of the areas NJPIES codes for is occupational exposure. This has allowed staff to further enhance capturing and classifying work-related poisonings with improved efforts in prevention. Also, NJPIES now streams NJ poison data, with case narratives, into our state syndromic surveillance system, EpiCenter, daily and is being used as supplemental data to the occupational chemical exposure data in EpiCenter.

"Worker got drop of Provet logic disinfectant in eye. Was exposed at work while cleaning a dog kennel. Did not flush eye and complains of a burning sensation." - *Case narratives*

The Impact

Veterinary health settings have unique considerations compared with human health care settings. The restraint of animals and the veterinary environment adds complexity to handling medications and underscores the necessity to provide veterinary specific hazard safety information and guidelines. To protect the health and safety of veterinary and animal care workers, the NJDOH OHS Unit created a toolkit of materials to prevent exposure to hazardous chemicals in the veterinary workplace. Material have been mailed to veterinary facilities and distributed through the New Jersey Local Information and Communication System (NJLINCS) state messaging system.

For more information and to access these outreach materials please visit:

nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/occupational-health-surveillance