

# Collecting data, saving lives

Poisoning accidents have yet not been systematically recorded throughout Germany. Children in particular can suffer serious damage. The BfR is therefore setting up a national poisoning register.



A frightening scenario for many parents: distracted for just a moment, the child nibbles on some berries or leaves from a poisonous plant or takes a sip of a cleaning product that wasn't properly sealed. "Fortunately, most poisoning accidents end relatively mildly," says Kathrin Begemann. "However, poisoning can also cause serious permanent damage or, in the worst case, even be fatal – especially if it is not treated quickly enough." The pharmacist has been researching the poisoning potential of both chemicals and plants at the German Federal Institute

for Risk Assessment (BfR) for decades. Examples include the poisonous doppelgangers of wild garlic and edible mushrooms.

If family members or childcare staff in nurseries and schools find themselves in such a situation, the federal states' poison centres should be the first port of call. Staffed around the clock, the experts at the other end of the line provide immediate information on first aid and further treatment in the event of suspected poisoning. They also advise the emergency services or medical

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staff treating poisoning incidents. Poison centres throughout Germany receive around 250,000 calls a year.

### BFR HAS BEEN COLLECTING DATA FOR SOME TIME

Poisoning accidents have yet not been systematically recorded throughout Germany. That is going to change: the BfR is setting up a national poisoning register. This is where the anonymised data on all poisoning accidents will come together. The BfR and its predecessor institutions have been collecting case reports on poisonings since 1990. The German Chemicals Act is the basis for this. According to this law, doctors must report all cases of poisoning with chemicals to the BfR, including suspected cases.

However, this has worked less well in practice so far. In fact, only up to two percent of current poisoning reports come from doctors' surgeries and hospitals. The majority of reports originate from employers' liability insurance associations and other statutory accident insurance companies, for example, on accidents at work involving chemicals.

The new national poisoning register aims to merge and evaluate this data with the information from calls to the poison centres in future. In addition to the substance responsible for the poisoning, the associated product and the type of ingestion will also be recorded, for example, whether the substance was swallowed or inhaled. The age group and gender of the person affected are also recorded. Instead of the approximately 8,000 reports that are received in the case database under the German Chemi-

## POISONING ACCIDENTS AMONG CHILDREN

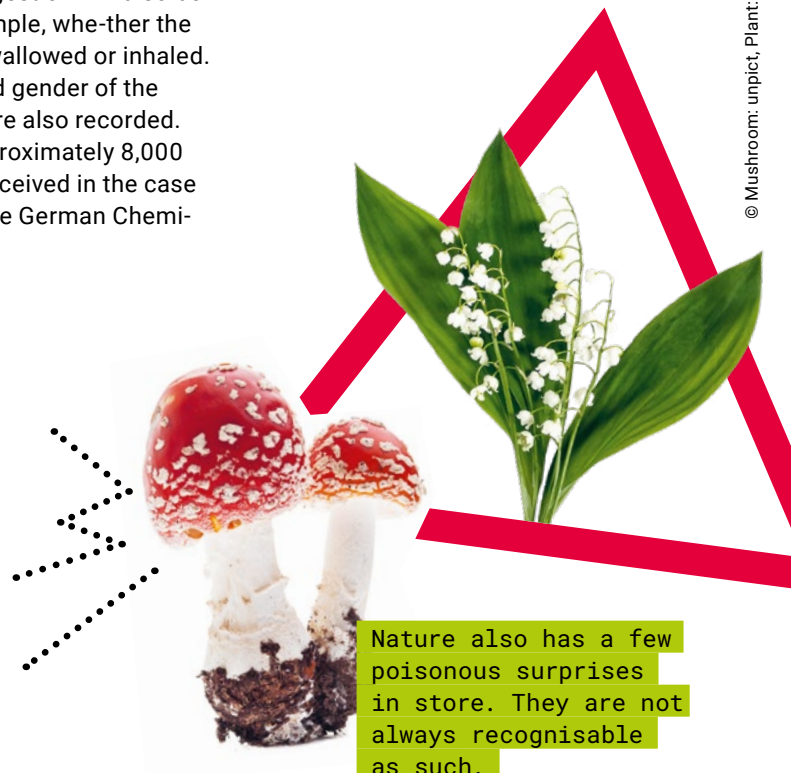
The BfR has developed a smart-phone app for poisoning accidents among children as a practical information and reference tool. You can call a poison centre for your federal state directly from the app in an emergency. There is also information on particular hazards in the home and advice on preventing poisoning accidents. To install the app, scan the relevant QR code or search for "Vergiftungsunfälle bei Kindern" in the app store.



**App for Android**  
(in German)



**App for iOS**  
(in German)



Nature also has a few poisonous surprises in store. They are not always recognisable as such.

## Potentially dangerous products should be recognised more quickly and the risk of further poisoning accidents should be reduced.

### ALPHANUMERIC LIFESAVER

Poison centres need the most precise information possible on the product in question in the event of a poisoning incident. Since the beginning of 2021, more and more household chemicals, such as cleaning products, have been labelled with the EU-wide standardised “UFI code”. The abbreviation stands for “unique formula identifier”. This 16-digit code consisting of numbers and letters allows poison centres to quickly and clearly identify the requested product and its ingredients. Specific information on the correct treatment can be provided based on the exact composition.

calcs Act on average each year at the moment, this figure is expected to rise to around 190,000 cases in the future. However, poisonings with narcotics and alcoholic beverages will not be recorded, since their effects are already known; neither will poisonings with medicines, as a separate monitoring system for medicines already exists.

### RECOGNISING DANGEROUS PRODUCTS FASTER

“The aim is to obtain a better overview of the actual number of poisoning accidents in Germany,” explains Dr Nina Glaser, who is coordinating and

preparing the introduction of the poisoning register at the BfR together with Kathrin Begemann. This will make it possible to recognise potentially dangerous products more quickly and reduce the risk of further poisoning accidents. “For example, by providing the packaging with a child-resistant cap or by the relevant monitoring authorities sometimes taking a product off the market completely.”

The idea of a national poisoning register has been around for some time. The BfR Committee for the Assessment of Intoxications proposed this kind of register back in 2014. At the beginning of 2018, its introduction was formalised in an agreement between the then “Grand Coalition” government of the CDU/CSU and SPD. Preparations have been underway since then. After all, data from different sources has to be merged and processed. The plan is for the register to be launched at the beginning of 2026 – and, in the best case, save lives with fast and accurate information on poisoning incidents. —



#### More information



BfR information  
“Poisoning”