

Belgian Poison Centre: annual overview 2020

Dominique Vandijck^{1,2}, Jonas Van Baelen¹, Jonas Moens¹, Eline Bekaert¹, Evelien De Smet¹, Pamela Selway¹, Régine Pire¹, Pascale Wallemacq¹, Anne-Marie Descamps^{1,2}

¹ Belgian Poison Centre, Brussels, Belgium

² Ghent University, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Ghent, Belgium

Objective

This study provides an overview of the number and type of calls received by the Belgian Poison Centre (BPC) in 2020.

Methods

Data of all calls to the BPC (January 1 - December 31, 2020) were collected and analyzed using appropriate statistics (SAS).

Results

The BPC received 65,308 calls in 2020 (60,668 in 2019, $p < 0.05$), of which 56,106 (86%) (involving 57,523 victims) due to an exposure, and 9,202 (14%) due to an information request.

Despite a minor decrease of 2.3% (21,151 in 2019 vs. 20,666 in 2020, $p > 0.05$), the vast majority (35.9%) of exposures were drug-related, of which paracetamol represented 8.2%. Drugs within the category 'nervous system' (e.g. antipsychotics, antidepressants, etc.) were most frequently involved (39.6%).

In 2019, there were 11,836 exposures to chemical household products vs. 12,247 in 2020 ($p > 0.05$). Due to the battle against the coronavirus: people bought large quantities and often highly concentrated products, especially products for personal hygiene and cleaning. Poured into smaller containers such as water or soft drink bottles, this led to accidents in which people accidentally drank from it. To clean or disinfect better, people also started (accidentally) combining or mixing products, with the risk of releasing irritating vapours. Irritation of the mucous membranes and severe shortness of breath were not uncommon. The BPC received 46.1% more calls for bleach and bleach-containing products than in 2019 (835 calls in 2019 compared to 1,220 calls in 2020, $p < 0.05$).

A 12.3% increase of cosmetic- and food-related exposures was noted (8,291 in 2019 vs. 9,308 in 2020, $p < 0.05$), of which a stable number of exposures (877 in 2019 vs. 876 in 2020, $p > 0.05$) due to essential oils.

Exposures to type 1 biocides significantly increased from 322 in 2019 to 1,676 in 2020 ($p < 0.05$), and exposures to type 2 biocides from 406 to 902 ($p < 0.05$). Finally, a 28.2% increase in exposures related to the group 'plants, mushrooms and animals' was observed, with 3,256 in 2019 and 4,175 in 2020 ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion

In its history, the BPC never received as much calls as in 2020, demonstrating its added value in today's and future healthcare. Trends in both, number and type of exposures are impacted by the corona pandemic.



#EAPCCT2022

CONTACT



dominique.vandijck@poisoncentre.be



Belgian Poison Centre
Bruynstraat 1, 1120 Brussels
(Belgium)



(+32) 02 264 96 36



[dominique_vandijck](https://www.instagram.com/dominique_vandijck)



[VandijckD](https://twitter.com/VandijckD)



[Dominique Vandijck](https://www.linkedin.com/in/DominiqueVandijck)



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