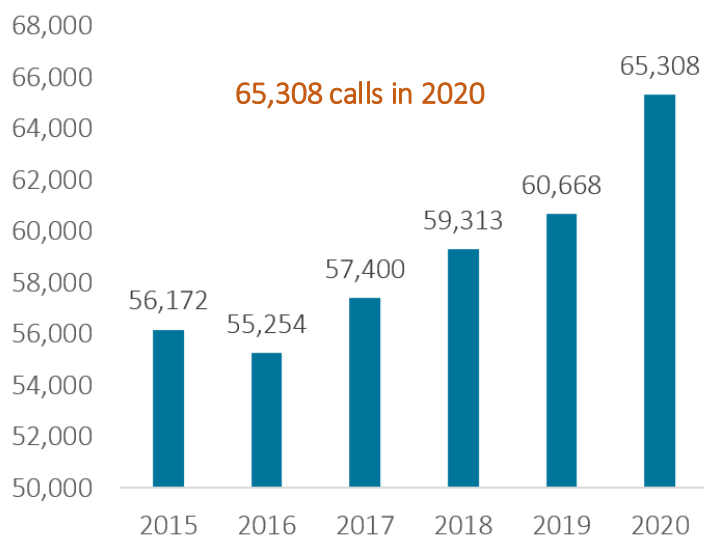


# Annual Review 2020 of the Belgian Poison Centre

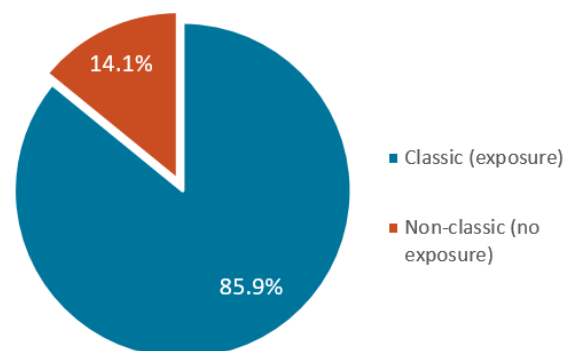
The Belgian Poison Centre is the reference and expertise centre for toxicology in Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

The Poison Centre provides 24/7 information and advice on toxicological problems to the public and healthcare professionals.

## Number of calls

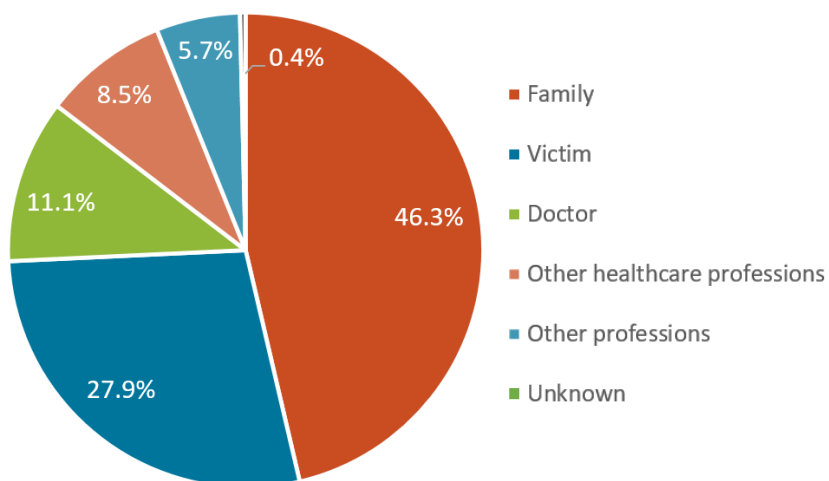


## Type of question

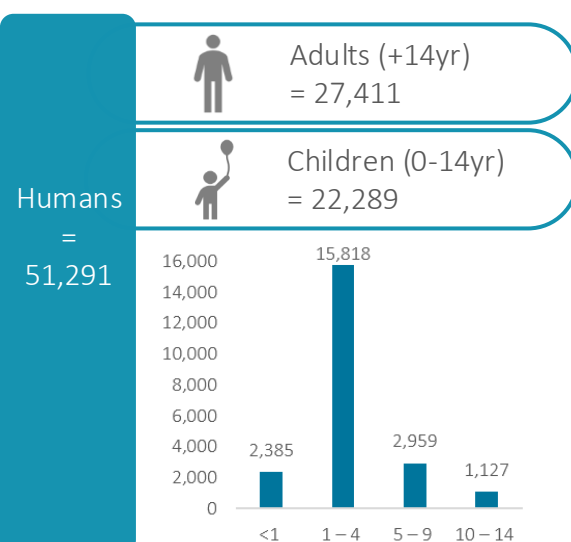


In 2020, the Belgian Poison Centre (BPC) received **56,106 (85.9%) "classic calls"** or calls with a real exposure to any product. All remaining **9,202 calls (14.1%)** were requests for information.

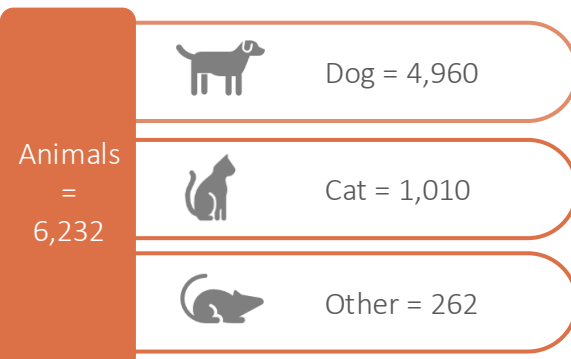
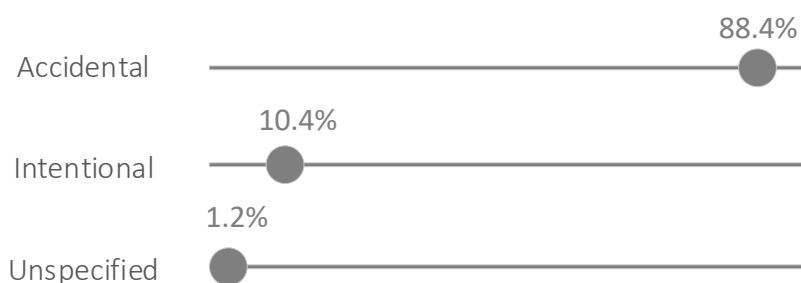
## Who is calling?



## Victims



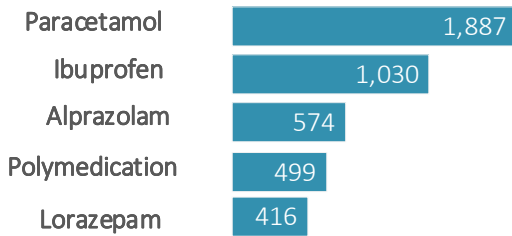
## Circumstances



# Main causes of poisoning: top 5 human exposures 2020

## 1. Drugs and medical devices

### Top 5 exposures to human drugs



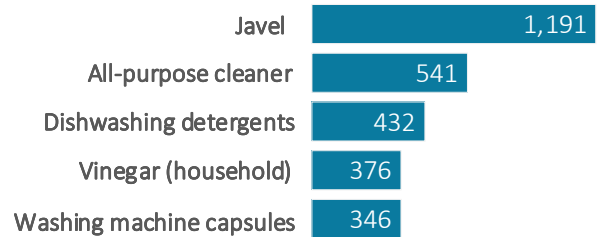
A total of **12,363 adults** and **6,868 children** experienced exposures to human drugs. In **39.6%** of cases, the drug involved was related to the **nervous system**. **Paracetamol** accounted for **8.2%** of all human drug exposures.

## 2. Chemical products

A total of **6,541 adults** and **5,075 children** were noted for exposures to chemicals. **Cleaning, care and maintenance products** (excluding biocides) accounted for **41.4%** of chemical product exposures.

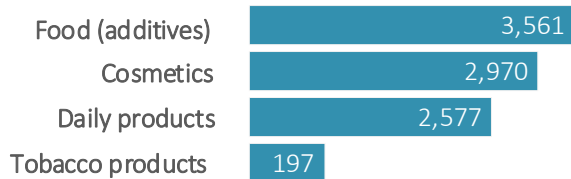
The number of calls for **hypochlorites** increased with **47.4%**. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, people were more often at home and focused on cleaning and hygiene.

### Top 5 exposures to chemical products



## 3. Cosmetics, food products, tobacco and everyday products

### Exposures to cosmetics, food products, tobacco and everyday products



A total of **3,577 adults** and **5,367 children** were exposed to cosmetics, food, tobacco and everyday products.

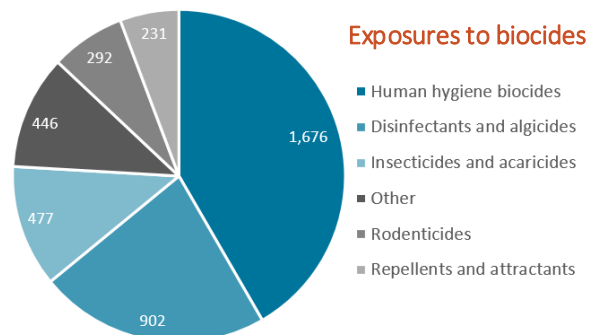
In the group of food products, **food & vitamin supplements (29.9%)** and **alcoholic beverages (22.9%)** constituted the vast majority of agents.

Children were most frequently exposed to cosmetics (**2,077 children** versus **782 adults**).

Products for daily use most often included **essential oils (36.6%)** and **toys (30.0%)**.

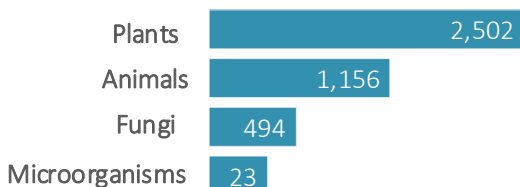
## 4. Biocides and plant protection products

Exposures to biocides accounted for **90.9%** of all exposures in this category of which **2,149 adults** and **1,869 children**. **299 adults** and **70 children** were exposed to plant protection products.



## 5. Living organisms

### Exposures to living organisms



**Plants** were the largest group in this category, with **2,502 exposures** in 2020, followed by **animals (1,156 exposures)**, **fungi (including mushrooms) (494 exposures)** and **microorganisms (23 exposures)**. Insect bites were the main cause of animal exposures. Most exposures to **microorganisms** occurred in the summer and were mainly exposures to **cyanobacteria**.

## Focus on a number of products in 2020

### E-cigarettes

In 2020, 59.6% of children became victim of accidental exposures to e-liquids / e-cigarettes.

In 48.6% of all exposures nicotine-based products were involved.

Oral exposures were the most commonly reported route among children aged between 1 - 4 years.

#### Exposures e-cigarettes 2020

Way of exposure	Adults	Children			Total	
		<1	1-4	5-9	N	%
Oral	12	4	32	1	49	75.3
Ocular	4	-	-	-	4	6.2
Cutaneous	2	-	2	-	4	6.2
Inhalation	8	-	-	-	8	12.3
<b>Total way of exposure</b>	26	4	34	1	65	100.0
<b>Total number of cases</b>	25	4	32	1	62	-



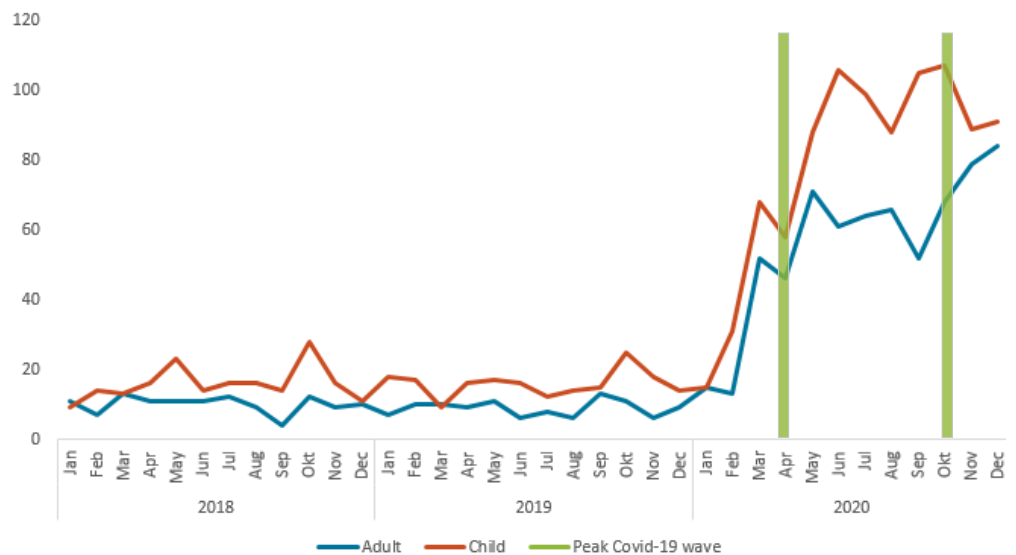
Due to their curiosity and exploration behaviour, toddlers and young children have an increased risk for accidental nicotine ingestion. Moreover, the sweet flavours and colourful packaging of e-liquids are very attractive for many children. Even a limited nicotine intake can already cause (severe) neurological, cardiac and respiratory symptoms. Several studies have shown the attractive effect of colourful packaging on children. The American Academy of Paediatrics, therefore, recommends that colourful packaging should no longer be used for e-liquids. The introduction of neutral packaging could reduce the number of exposures. In addition, we also recommend to store the e-liquids / e-cigarettes in a child-proof place.

### Disinfectants (biocides type 1)



The number of calls for incidents involving alcohol hand gels increased fivefold last year (323 calls in 2019 versus 1,675 calls in 2020).

#### Disinfectants (biocides type 1)



The use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers (ABHS) has increased exponentially as one of the measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. However, improper use is associated with potentially serious complications.

In 2020, the BPC received 480 calls for people with accidental ocular ABHS exposures, including 248 children.

Also, ingestion of ABHS can cause alcohol intoxication in children. Hence, we recommend to use ABHS and household products with caution and care, in particular when used by children.

## Responsibilities of the Belgian Poison Centre (BPC)

### Information, advise and triage to the public and healthcare professionals

The BPC aims to decrease the number of incidents, including mortality associated with intoxications and wants to contribute in its prevention. The medical staff is available 24/7 and answers questions from the public and healthcare professionals.



### Data centre for product compositions

In order to be able to give accurate advice on the management of patients with (suspected) intoxication, reliable information on the composition of products is of key importance. The details of these product compositions are stored in a database to which the medical staff has 24/7 access.

### Partner in scientific research

By answering more than 65,000 calls in 2020 and more than 2 million calls in its history, the BPC has a unique dataset on poisonings in Belgium and Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Every year several scientific projects are performed.



### Antidotes: national expertise centre and emergency stock

The BPC has a 24/7 emergency stock of a strictly selected number of antidotes (available on demand).

### Toxicovigilance: surveillance

This involves identifying (potentially) high risk situations (an emerging or unacceptable health risk for humans or animals), followed by proposing prevention & control measures to the responsible authorities.

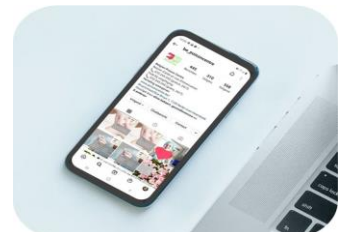


### BPC Academy

The BPC stays informed about the most recent scientific developments in the field of healthcare, toxicology and healthcare policy by participating in several (scientific) fora.

### Point of contact for prevention

The communication policy of the BPC aims to inform the general public and medical professionals regarding its roles and mission.



### Partner in (inter)national healthcare policy

The BPC is closely linked to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (GDL). GDL citizens can contact the BPC any time by phone (8002-5500). As the founding member of the EAPCCT (European Association of Poisons Centres and Clinical Toxicologists) in 1964, the BPC is actively involved in its operation.

## Antidotes: national expertise centre and emergency stock

An antidote is a drug that shortens the residence time of a poison in the body and/or inhibits its effect on the body. In order to help a victim quickly, the BPC has a 24/7 emergency stock of a strictly selected number of antidotes (only available on demand). These are used to treat poisonings from certain drugs, fungi, metals, cyanide compounds, toxic alcohols and nerve gases.

### Deliveries antidote 2020

Antidote	INN name	Number of deliveries
Digifab®	Digoxin-specific antibodies	6
Fomepizole Serb®	4-methylpyrazole	6
Contrathion®	Pralidoxime	2
Legalon Sil®	Silibinin	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>16</b>



The BPC receives an antidote order



The necessary forms are filled in and the antidote is carefully packed for transport



A transport company is called to pick up the antidote



The antidote arrives at the hospital to be administered to the patient

## What is asked during a call?

**Age of the victim:** child (weight?) versus adult?

**Name of the product involved?** keep the packaging of the product within reach.

**The quantity of exposure** (number of tablets, tea or tablespoon,...)?

**What exactly happened:** accident, suicide, ....?

**The victim's condition:** presence of symptoms (yes/no)?



## First aid for poisoning



Call the BPC, do not wait for symptoms.

Never drink milk: **milk is not an antidote!**

**Never induce vomiting**, as this may cause deterioration of the patient.

In case of ocular or skin exposure, **rinse immediately with water** without losing time.



For urgent information and medical advice, call  
**+32 (0)70 245 245** (Belgium)  
or  
**8002-5500** (Luxembourg)  
free of charge (24/7).

For non-urgent questions (WITHOUT exposure to a product) please contact  
**medical.team@poisoncentre.be**.



be\_poisoncentre



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www.facebook.com/agccap



Antigifcentrum – Centre Antipoisons



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**070 245 245**

This infographic shows some of the striking results from the Poison Centre annual report 2020. The full annual review can be downloaded from [www.antigifcentrum.be/publicaties-en-dossiers/jaarrapport](http://www.antigifcentrum.be/publicaties-en-dossiers/jaarrapport) (in Dutch or French). Parts of this publication may be reproduced provided the source is acknowledged: 'Annual Review Poison Centre 2020 (2021), Belgian Poison Centre'.