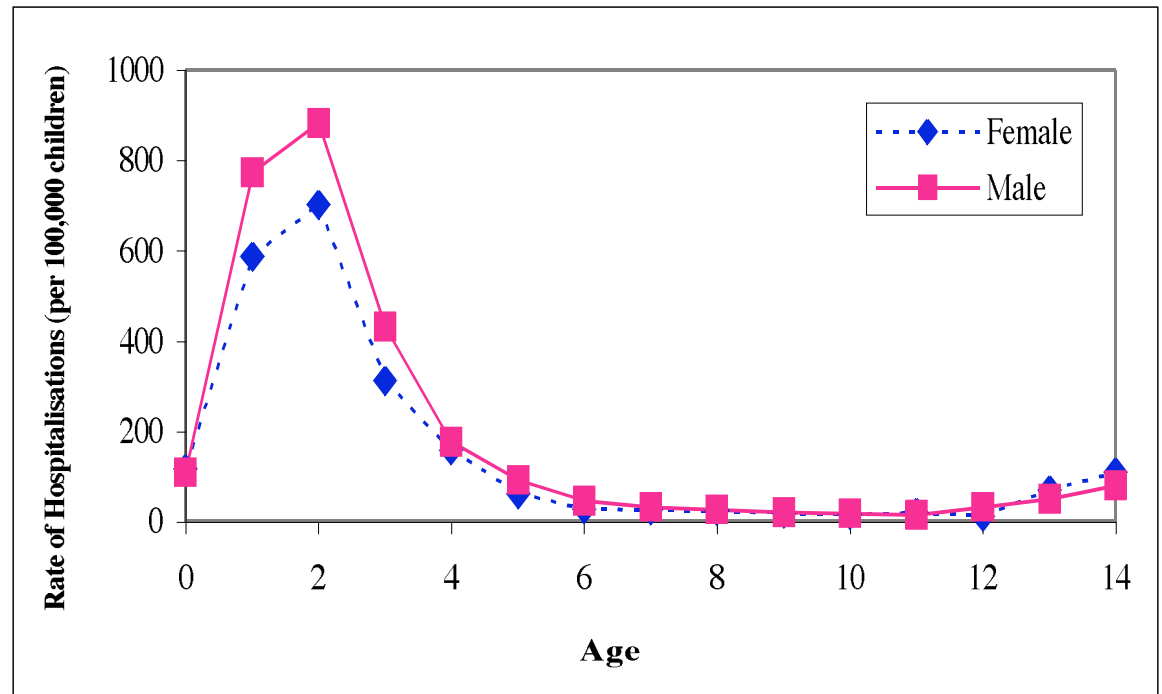


# Unintentional Poisonings in Children

This fact sheet describes the incidence of unintentional poisonings among 0-14 year olds in New Zealand that resulted in death (1990-1999) or hospitalisation (1993-2002).

- For children aged 0-14 years, poisonings accounted for 14 injury fatalities, and 5,034 injury hospitalisations.
- 93% of child fatalities and 98% of child hospitalisations for poisonings were unintentional.
- Rates of unintentional poisonings in the child population were 1.5 per 100,000 children for fatalities, and 583 per 100,000 children for hospitalisations.
- The highest rates of unintentional poisoning occurred in children aged 1 and 2 years. The rates were substantially lower for children aged 6 to 12 years of age. Rates were slightly higher for 13 and 14 year olds (Figure 1).
- Male and female hospitalisations for unintentional poisonings followed a similar pattern across ages. The male peak (at 2 years) was slightly higher than the female peak (also at 2 years).



**Figure 1.** Rates of hospitalisations resulting from unintentional poisonings amongst 0-14 year olds in New Zealand by age, 1993-2002.

- The most common categories of poisoning agents across all age groups are shown in Table 1.
- Children were most at risk of unintentional poisoning when aged from 1 to 3 years old. This applied to all poisoning agents examined.

### Poisoning Agent Examples

Analgesics, antipyretics, antirheumatics: for example, paracetamol, codeine, non-steroid anti-inflammatories, aspirin.

Psychotropics: for example, antidepressants, antipsychotics.

Ophthalmological drugs: drugs used in eye procedures.

Otorhinolaryngological drugs: drugs used in nose and larynx procedures.

Sedatives and hypnotics: for example, benzodiazepines, barbiturates, anti-anxiety agents, sleeping tablets.

Respiratory effecting agent: for example, antiasthmatics, muscle relaxants.

Primary systemic agent: affects the central nervous system e.g. analeptics.

*Data Source: Morbidity (1993-2002) and Mortality (1990-1999) Data, New Zealand Health Information Service, Ministry of Health, Wellington.*

*Poisonings were identified using the International Classification of Disease diagnosis codes for editions 9 (960.0-989.9) and 10 (T36.0-T65.9).*

For further details on injury data visit our website:  
<http://www.otago.ac.nz/ipru/Stats/>

For advice on poisoning contact the National Poisons Centre, Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, University of Otago, Dunedin,  
0800 POISON / 0800 764 766, [poisons@otago.ac.nz](mailto:poisons@otago.ac.nz)

Prepared by: MJ Trotter, SCR Stephenson, JC Simpson, DM Casey, June 2004

**Table 1:** Hospitalisations resulting from unintentional poisonings in New Zealand by the most common poisoning agents for ages 0-14 years, 1993-2002.

Poisoning Agent	Age (Years)					
	0	1	2	3	4	5-14
Poisoning by psychotropic agents	26	169	213	88	59	135
Poisoning by analgesics, antipyretics, and antirheumatics	18	88	267	143	51	81
Poisoning by topical agents primarily affecting skin and mucous membrane and by ophthalmological, otorhinolaryngological and dental drugs	17	77	65	32	9	10
Poisoning by agents primarily acting on smooth and skeletal muscles and the respiratory system	9	55	90	45	20	15
Poisoning by agents primarily affecting the cardiovascular system	4	51	115	37	16	32
Poisoning by drugs primarily affecting the autonomic nervous system	4	38	69	40	13	13
Poisoning by primarily systemic agents	3	34	78	39	10	12
Poisoning by anticonvulsants and anti-Parkinsonism drugs	1	18	55	34	15	51
Toxic effect of corrosive aromatics, acids, and caustic alkalis	15	102	47	20	15	33
Toxic effects of other pesticides, not elsewhere classified	22	81	43	20	11	10
Toxic effect of noxious substances eaten as food	19	72	65	60	29	62
Toxic effects of soaps and detergents	5	59	12	2	0	4
Toxic effect of other substances, chiefly nonmedical as to source	46	223	107	44	20	39
Totals	189	1067	1226	604	268	497

## INJURY PREVENTION RESEARCH UNIT

Department of Preventive and Social Medicine  
University of Otago

PO Box 913 Dunedin New Zealand  
Tel 64 3 479 8342 Fax 64 3 479 8337

Email [iprunz@otago.ac.nz](mailto:iprunz@otago.ac.nz) Website [www.otago.ac.nz/ipru](http://www.otago.ac.nz/ipru)