

Hazards of Holiday Plants

Bright holiday decorations can create a festive atmosphere for the individuals we support as well as the staff in both communities and facilities. However, when common holiday plants are part of the decorations the risk of poisonings can increase. Since the holiday season is a busy time with many distractions, it is important stay alert and keep in mind that many attractive plants are poisonous when parts of them are chewed or swallowed. Also, holiday plants (or any decorations) can be a choking or aspiration risk, especially for those who are at risk for choking. All staff and caretakers can help to prevent poisonings and related problems by knowing the hazards of some common holiday plants and staying attentive to vulnerable individuals in our facilities and community programs.

Common Risky Holiday Plants Include:



Holly—The bright red berries on this plant are especially attractive and may be mistaken for candy. However, swallowing more than one or two berries can result in stomach pain, vomiting, and diarrhea, but eating 20 berries can kill a child or small adult. Though the berries may be the part of this plant that is commonly eaten, the bark, leaves and seeds are also toxic.



Mistletoe—All parts of this plant contain toxic substances but the white berries are particularly dangerous and can cause vomiting diarrhea and stomach pain. As a precaution, it is recommended that Mistletoe be hung in a plastic bag or a piece of netting to prevent the berries from falling on the floor where they can be picked up and eaten.



Poinsettia—The leaves of this plant are mildly toxic and eating a few leaves can cause vomiting or ill feeling. Also, rubbing the sap of this plant into the skin may cause an itchy rash.



Jerusalem Cherry—This plant bears toxic fruit that resembles a cherry tomato in both appearance and flavor. Swallowing this fruit can cause gastric upset and vomiting. Skin redness, restlessness, hallucinations, and in rare cases seizures may also occur.



Amaryllis—The bulbs of this plant may cause abdominal pain, cardiac arrhythmias and convulsions if they are eaten.

Families, staff and caretakers should take reasonable precautions to prevent anyone from handling or ingesting any of these decorative plants. They also should be aware of symptoms and know how to obtain prompt medical intervention and emergency services if they suspect that plant ingestion or poisoning has occurred.