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INTOXICATIONS IN PAEDIATRICS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT IN THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

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Abstract: Paediatric Emergency Department consultations have experienced a discreet increase in recent years. Although the greater presence of safety caps and better health education of families seemed to justify a decrease in the number of consultations in the Pediatric Emergency Department. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of consultations for recreational alcohol poisoning (Beatriz Azkunaga et al., 2011). The aim of this document is to contribute to the standardization of practice in this area by providing the best available evidence.

Key words: intoxication, emergency, screening, toxidromes, antidotes.







METHODOLOGY

A systematic review was carried out by accessing databases such as Pubmed, Scielo, and the Virtual Library of the Andalusian Health System. We included scientific articles in Spanish, with a maximum age of 5 years. Subsequently, we analysed those associated with poisoning in paediatric age and its management.

IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE

Poisoning is the fifth leading cause of death due to unintentional injury, with children under 5 years of age, and especially children under 2 years of age, being the most vulnerable (Arroyo, Rodrigo, & Teresa Marrón, 2014). Poisonings in the paediatric age attended in hospital Paediatric Emergency Departments in our environment account for about 0.30% of the consultations attended (B Azkunaga, Mintegi, Salmón, Acedo, & Del Arco, 2013).

More than 90% of poisonings occur in the home and with household products. While it is true that mortality has decreased, the same is not true for morbidity and consumption of health resources. Up to 25% of unintentional poisonings occur by storing certain substances in containers other than the original ones or leaving them within the reach of children. In this regard, caustics alone account for 3% of the total. Another 6% of poisonings are due to errors in the administration of medicines (Mintegi et al., 2015). The groups of drugs most involved were psychotropic drugs (24.5% of all unintentional drug poisonings), anticatarrhal (16.2%) and antipyretics (15.4%), with benzodiazepines being the most frequently recorded group of psychotropic drugs (85.7%) (Zubiaur, Salazar, Azkunaga, & Mintegi, 2015).

In a study carried out in our country, it was pointed out that between 12-17 years of age, the highest percentage of intoxications occur for recreational purposes (45%) and for self-intoxication (27%) (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2020).







EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

ANAMNESIS

A. Patients.

We can differentiate 2 large groups of patients who consult for a possible intoxication:

- Preschoolers-school children under 5 years of age: they constitute the largest group, in which intoxications have the following characteristics:
 - Non-voluntary.
 - Usually at home.
 - For near-immediate reference.
 - Children are usually asymptomatic.
 - The poison is known.
 - The prognosis is generally favorable.
- Adolescents, whose intoxications are distinguished by:
 - They can be intentional (usually with recreational and, less often, suicidal intent).
 - Often outside the home.
 - Consult with longer evolution time.
 - Generate symptoms very often.
 - The toxicant is not always known.
 - More complex handling.

A separate group, of very low volume, but of great importance, are intentional poisonings for homicidal purposes or those that occur in the context of abuse (Mintegi et al., 2015).

B. Screening tools

The tools for the detection of exposure that have been classically used are reduced to the questionnaire to parents or children, and there is no standardized and consensual toxicological screening applied in paediatric emergency departments. It is important to establish 4 fundamental points, because depending on this the action will be different (Garcia-Algar, Cuadrado González, & Falcon, 2016).

- The type of toxicant: it is important to highlight the existence of substances that are usually non-toxic, the ingestion of which does not generally produce symptoms. Although no chemical agent is completely safe, the materials listed in the annexes (see Table 1. Substances usually non-toxic) have been ingested and have not produced significant toxicity, except in cases of massive ingestion. Non-toxic ingestion occurs when a person consumes a product that does not normally produce symptoms.
- The route of exposure: depending on how contact with the poison occurred, the way of eliminating it will also be different.
 - Ophthalmic or cutaneous exposure: chemical agents, insecticides, topical drugs, systemic drugs applied topically, traditional remedies, etc.







- Respiratory exposure: CO poisoning.
- O Digestive exposure: the most frequent.
- The time elapsed since the contact: when in doubt as to whether the agent with which you have had contact is toxic or not, it is best to seek specialized attention as soon as possible.
- The amount: the average swallow volume of a child under 5 years old is 5ml, of 10 years old is 10ml and of an adult is 15ml (Beatriz Azkunaga, Mintegi, Bizkarra, Fernández, & of the Spanish Society of Pediatric Emergencies, 2011).

EXPLORATION

A child with poisoning can be confronted with various situations:

- Life-threatening situation: this does not usually occur in accidental poisonings, but it does occur in recreational poisonings, although not always.
- Symptomatic but stable patient. In this case, there may be someone around to report what happened or, on the contrary, it will be necessary to intuit it through the symptoms: altered level of consciousness, metabolic acidosis, cardiorespiratory compromise, etc.
- Asymptomatic patients who have ingested a toxic substance and whose effects are manifested in the long term ("time bombs") as may occur with paracetamol, MAOIs, iron, lithium, mushrooms, etc. Each toxic substance must be known in order to act in a specific way.
- Contact with a non-toxic substance at known doses. This is the most common reason for consultation in children. It is important to ensure the non-toxicity of the product, reassure the companions and insist on the importance of preventing this type of accident.

Knowledge of toxidromes, as a set of signs and symptoms observed after exposure to a substance (Bhaskaran et al., 2015), will allow us to effectively guide initial emergency care, through basic diagnostic guidance (Society guideline links: Treatment of acute poisoning caused by specific agents other than drugs of abuse - UpToDate, n.d.).

An appendix is included at the end with tables identifying the main serious alterations and relating them to the substances that can potentially cause them (See tables Table 2. Electrocardiographic Abnormalities Induced by Drugs and Toxins Table 3. Toxicants that induce hemodynamic changes ,Table 3. Toxicants that induce hemodynamic changes Table 4. Toxics that alter thermoregulation) (Society guideline links: Treatment of acute poisoning caused by specific agents other than drugs of abuse - UpToDate, n.d.).

MANAGEMENT OF THE INTOXICATED PATIENT

Support Measures.

The initial management of a possible poisoning would be:







- Life support measures if the situation is critical: ABCDE (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2020).
 - A. Airway: maintain a patent airway: facilitate opening and aspirate secretions if present.
 - B. Ventilation: assess auscultation, respiratory rate, O2 saturation and capnography. If there is respiratory difficulty, apply O2 with mask and reservoir at 15litres/min.
 - C. Circulation: assess cardiac auscultation, HR, BP, pulses, skin temperature and capillary refill. If there is circulatory compromise facilitate venous access for volume administration and/or vasoactive drugs.
 - D. Neurological assessment: assess level of consciousness, pupils and motor reactivity. If the level of consciousness decreases, maintain a permeable airway, administer O2 considering endotracheal intubation and obtain venous access.
 - E. Exposure of the patient: always try to maintain the patient's privacy, whether the care takes place in a hospital or outside it. Avoid the presence of non-essential personnel and, if possible, facilitate the presence of parents in the case of a minor.
- Surveillance in those stable patients who may subsequently present some problem derived from the poisoning, in this case the surveillance consists of (Beatriz Azkunaga et al., 2011):
 - Performance of laboratory tests.
 - o Measures to reduce the absorption of the toxicant.
 - o Administration of antidotes.
 - o To favour the elimination of the toxicant.

Emergency Department Approach

Depending on the contact route (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2020):

- Ophthalmic contact: after contact with a chemical agent, the eye should be washed abundantly with water or saline solution for 20 minutes. Subsequently, depending on the agent, referral to a specialist will be assessed.
- Skin contact: this can be with insecticides, solvents, topical anesthetics (EMLA type). Clothing should be removed and washed with soap and water.
- Inhalation: the most important thing is to remove the patient from the source and administer 100% O2.
- Oral ingestion: this is the most common, and decontamination of the digestive tract
 must be performed. Currently the technique of choice is the administration of
 activated charcoal, leaving gastric lavage as a second choice for those situations in
 which charcoal is not indicated. The administration of cathartics and total intestinal
 lavage are performed very occasionally. Syrup of ipecac is banished in the







management of the intoxicated pediatric patient (Lapus, Slattery, & King, 2010).

Therapeutic intervention

(Mintegi et al., 2015) (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2020).

Use of Activated Charcoal. As mentioned above it is the method of choice. It will be
administered if the toxic substance has been ingested in less than 1-2 hours, since
most liquid poisons are absorbed in about 30 minutes, and in the case of solids in 12 hours. After this time, decontamination is not very effective. It should be mixed
with water to obtain a slurry of at least 25g per 200ml of water.

o In < 1 year: 1g/kg.

1-14 years: 0.5-1g/kg (max. 25-50g)

o In > 14 years: 25-100g.

If the child has not taken the charcoal within 20 minutes, it is indicated to administer it through a gold or nasogastric tube. In general, one dose is usually sufficient except in the case of ingestion of delayed-release substances (Carbamazepine, Dapsone, Phenobarbital, Quinine...) or substances with active enterohepatic recirculation (Digoxin, Indomethacin, tricyclic antidepressants...). It can be associated with gastric lavage in the case of acute poisoning with vital risk, decreased level of consciousness (prior protection of the airway) or if there has been or there is a risk of seizures.

CONTRAINDICATIONS:

- Altered level of consciousness with unprotected airway.
- o Ingestion of unfixed substances: heavy metals (iron, lithium), alcohols, hydrocarbons and caustics.
- o Gastrointestinal perforation or bleeding.

Possible complications:

- Vomiting: if vomiting occurs within 30 minutes after administration of charcoal, a new dose at 0.5g/kg can be administered.
- Bronchoaspiration.
- Absorption of antidotes.
- Gastric lavage. It is performed in the case of patients with ingestion of large quantities of toxic substances, which can deteriorate in the first hour after contact and in the case of ingestion of toxins that cannot be absorbed by activated charcoal.
 It should be performed within 1-2 hours after ingestion because after that time it may not be effective.







PROCEDURE:

- Protect the airway or if intubation is not possible.
- o Insert gold or nasogastric tube.
- Patient in left lateral decubitus and trendelemburg.
- Aspirate gastric contents.
- If needed, a dose of activated charcoal can be introduced and wait 5 minutes to start.
- Subsequently instill warm saline solution at 10ml/kg (max. 200-300ml).
- Massage upper left quadrant.
- Aspirate gastric contents and instill again.
- The operation is repeated until the contents are clear.
- o If indicated, a new dose of activated charcoal or antidote, if available, is administered.

ANTIDOTOS

These are substances that cancel or reduce the toxicity of a given substance by inhibiting its action in the body, or by transforming it into an inactive metabolite and/or favouring its elimination. Table 5Antidotes lists some antidotes (Mintegi et al., 2015).

In case of poisoning it is important to know where or who to go to: Institute of Toxicology and paediatric emergency services.







ANNEXES

Table 1. Substances usually non-toxic

Tuble 1. Substances usually non-toxic				
Substances usually non-toxic				
Abrasives	Sweeteners (saccharin, cyclamate)			
Bath oil	Fertilizers (no herbicides or insecticides)			
Engine oil	H2O2			
Mineral oil (except suction)	Incense			
Body Conditioners	Soaps and bubble bath soaps			
Watercolors	Pencil (graphite, colors)			
Adhesives	Bleach <5% sodium hypochlorite			
Toilet water	Calamine lotion			
Seaweed	Hand lotions and creams			
Air fresheners (spray and refrgerator)	Lubricants			
Antacids	Eye make-up			
Antibiotics (most)	Putty (less than 60g)			
Clay	Zinc oxide			
Prussian Blue	Dehumidifying packs			
Lipsticks	Toothpaste			
Bitumen (if it does not contain anilines)	Perfumes			
Glitter	Newspaper			
Bronzers	3% Peroxide			
Matches	Paint (interior or latex)			
Cigarettes	Hair products (tonics, sprays, dyes)			
Glues and glues	Soft Purging			

Glues and glues Soft Purging Colonies Silica gel

Blush Fabric softeners

Contraceptives Plugs

Corticosteroids Thermometers (elementary HG)
Cosmetics Ink (black, blue - not permanent)

Baby CosmeticsBallpoint inkEasy erase markersChalkShaving creams and lotionsVaseline

Liquid shampoos Candles (beeswax or paraffin)

Iodophilic disinfectants Vitamians

Deodorants Warfarin (<0.5%)

Detergents (phosphate type, anionic) Plaster

Source: Azkunaga B, Mintegi S, Salmón N, Acedo Y, Del Arco L. Poisonings in children under 7 years of age in Spain. Aspects for improvement in prevention and treatment. An Pediatrics. June 1, 2013;78(6):355-60.







Table 2. Electrocardiographic Abnormalities Induced by Drugs and Toxins

Bradycardia / AV	Supraventricular	Ventricular	QRS and QT
block	Tachycardia	Tachycardia	prolongation interval
Beta-blockers	Sympathomimetics	Sympathomimetics	Antidepressants
Calcium channel blockers	Amphetamines	Cocaine	Antipsychotics
Cardiac glycosides	Cocaine	Amphetamines	Antihistamines
Digoxin	Theophylline	Theophylline	Diphenhydramine
Digitoxin	Caffeine	Antidepressants	Astemizole
Red shearing	Methylphenidate	TCA	Terfenadine
Digitalis lanata	Ephedrine	Antipsychotics	Antiarrhythmics
Digitalis purpurea	Pseudoephedrine	Phenothiazines	Quinidine
Bufotenin	Albuterol	Chlorinated hydrocarbons	Disopyramide
Oleander	Dobutamine	Chloral hydrate	Procainamide
Alpha-adrenergic agonists	Epinephrine	Solvents	Propafenone
Phenylpropanolamine	Dopamine	Fluoride	Flecainide, encainide
Clonidine	Anticholinergics	Cardiac glycosides	Amiodarone
lmidazolines	Antihistamines	Potassium	Calcium channel blockers (rare)
Cholinergics	TCA		Beta-blockers (rare
Organophosphates	Phenothiazines		Propoxyphene
Carbamates	Clozapine		Organophosphat insecticides
Opioids	Atropine		Antimicrobials
Sedative hypnotics	Scopolamine		Amantadine
Magnesium	Thyroid hormone		Azithromycin
	Cellular Asphyxiants		Chloroquine
	Carbon monoxide		Erythromycin
	Drug withdrawal states		Pentamidine
			Quinine
			Quinolones (eg,
			Ciprofloxacin)
			Arsenic
			Thallium
			Fluoride
			Citrate

drugs of abuse







Table 3. Toxicants that induce hemodynamic changes

	Toxicants that induce hemodynamic changes					
Hypertension with tachycardia	Hypertension with bradycardia	Hypotension with tachycardia	Hypotension with bradycardia			
Sympathomimetics	Alpha-adrenergic	Beta-adrenergic	Beta-blockers			
Amphetamines	agonists Phenylpropanolamine	agonists. Theophylline	Calcium channel blockers			
Cocaine Ephedrine Pseudoephedrine	Phenylephrine Phentermine Ergot alkaloids	Albuterol Isoproterenol Terbutaline	Cardiac glycosides Digoxin Digitalis purpurea			
Theophylline	Sumatriptan	Caffeine	Oleander			
Caffeine	Clonidine (early)	Disulfiram reaction (delayed)	Hemlock			
Methylphenidate Cat (catinoids) Anticholinergics Antihistamines	Guanfacine Imidazolines Tetrahydrozoline Oxymetazoline	Toxic alcohols Isopropyl alcohol Carbon monoxide Alpha-adrenergic antagonists	Bufotenin/serotonin Clonidine Alpha-methyldopa Cyanide			
Tricyclic antidepressants (early)	Cholinergic agents	Doxazocin	Carbon monoxide (late)			
Phenothiazines (some)	Organophosphates	Hydralazine	Opioids			
Antiparkinsonian agents	Carbamates	Tricyclic antidepressants	Sedative hypnotics			
Muscle relaxants Clozapine Central hallucinogens Designer Amphetamines Lysergic acid	Steroid hormones Glucocorticoids Mineralocorticoids Estrogen Progesterone	Heavy metals (acute) Iron Arsenic Colchicina Nitrates	Barbiturates Benzodiazepines Cholinergics Organophosphates Carbamates			
diethylamide (LSD) Phencyclidine (PCP) Synthetic cannabinoids Poisonings Black Widow Spider Bite	Androgens Yohimbine Heavy metals Lead	Sodium nitroprusside	Antiarrhythmics			
Scorpion stings	Disulfiram reaction (early)					
Drug withdrawal states	(
MAOIs (tyramine- containing foods) Nicotine						
Cholinergic agents (sometimes)						
Organophosphates						
Carbamates						
Thyroid hormone						

Society guideline links: Treatment of acute poisoning caused by specific agents other than drugs of abuse







Table 4. Toxics that alter thermoregulation

Toxins that alter thermoregulation

HYPERTHERMIA

Opioids

Hyperactivity / muscle stiffness

.....

Sympathomimetics

Sedative hypnotics
Benzodiazepines

HYPOTHERMIA

Cocaine
Amphetamines
Phenylpropanolamine

Barbiturates Alcohols

Ephedrine

Sympatholytics

Cat Derivatives
Imidazolines

Beta-blockers Clonidine

Anticholinergics
Drug withdrawal states

Alpha-adrenergic antagonists **Hypoglycemic agents**

Lithium

Antipsychotics

Central hallucinogens

General anesthetic agents

Phencyclidine

Carbon monoxide

Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD)

Designer Amphetamines (MDMA,

MDEA)

Synthetic cannabinoids

Medications that cause seizures

Drugs that cause flaccid coma

Isoniazid Theophylline

Strychnine

Neuroleptic malignant syndrome

Serotonin syndrome MAO inhibitors Malignant hyperthermia

Deteriorated heat dissipation

Altered sweating

Increased metabolic rate
Uncoupled oxidative
phosphorylation

Anticholinergic agents Antihistamines Salicylates Dinitrophenol, pentachlorophenol

Phenothiazines

Thyroid hormone

Tricyclic antidepressants

Society guideline links: Treatment of acute poisoning caused by specific agents other than drugs of abuse







Table 5Antidotes

ANTIDOTE	TOXIC	
Atropine	Organophosphorus pesticides , and	
	substances	
	cholinergic (Physiostigmine, Neostigmine)	
Methylene blue	In methemoglobinemia	
Bicarbonate	Tricyclic antidepressants	
Biperidene	Levomepromaxine, Butyrophenones,	
	Metoclopramide	
Calcium	Calcium antagonists	
Desferroxamine	Iron intoxication	
Ethanol	Methanol, Ethylene Glycol	
Physostigmine	Anticholinergics	
Flumazenil	Benzodiazepines	
Fomepizol	Ethylene glycols (antifreeze)	
FAB Fragments	Digoxin	
Glucagon	Insulin and β-blockers	
Glucose	Hypoglycemia (from insulin or ADOS)	
N-Acetylcysteine	Paracetamol	
Naloxone	Opioids	
Sodium nitrite	Cyanide	
100% O2	CO poisoning	
Penicillamine	Heavy metals (copper, mercury, zinc)	
Pyridoxine	Isoniazid	
Protamine	Heparin	
Vitamin K	Oral anticoagulants	

Source: Azkunaga B, Mintegi S, Salmón N, Acedo Y, Del Arco L. Poisonings in children under 7 years of age in Spain. Aspects for improvement in prevention and treatment. An Pediatrics. June 1, 2013;78(6):355-60.







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