



# THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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[nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)

## **2006 Alert #38: Poisonings Associated With the Use of an Illegal Pesticide, Tres Pasitos, in New York City**

- **Tres Pasitos (meaning “Three Little Steps”), which contains a potent insecticide called Aldicarb, is sold illegally in New York City and consists of brown grains distributed in unlabeled containers or clear plastic bags.**
- **Aldicarb is a reversible inhibitor of acetylcholinesterase and exposure can lead to weakness, blurred vision, headache, nausea, vomiting, tearing, sweating, tremors, and, in high doses, death due to paralysis of the nervous system.**
- **Since January 1, 2006, 15 cases of human poisoning, including 3 children, have been reported to the New York City Poison Control Center.**
- **Safe and effective alternative forms of pest control are available.**

**Please Distribute to All Clinical Staff in Pediatrics, Primary Care, Emergency Medicine, Internal Medicine, Family Medicine and Laboratory Medicine**

November 1, 2006

Dear Colleagues,

In the past month, three New Yorkers – one child and two adults – were poisoned by Tres Pasitos. All have made a full recovery. So far in 2006, there have been 15 individuals poisoned, including 3 children. These poisonings occurred primarily in Washington Heights in Manhattan, and in the South Bronx. The sale and use of Tres Pasitos may be on the rise; in 2005, there were 5 cases of Tres Pasitos poisoning; none of them were children.

Tres Pasitos (meaning “Three Little Steps”) is the brand name of a potent insecticide produced primarily in Mexico and the Dominican Republic and imported illegally to the United States. The active ingredient is aldicarb, which is a restricted use pesticide whose use is allowed only in occupational settings by certified applicators because of its acute toxicity. Tres Pasitos consists of brown grains that can be easily confused for food and is being sold in unlabeled containers or clear plastic bags. It is usually sold illegally to the public as a rodenticide, but may also be described by sellers as an insecticide appropriate for roaches and bed bugs.

Aldicarb is a carbamate pesticide which causes reversible carbamylation of the acetylcholinesterase enzyme, allowing accumulation of acetylcholine. Due to their similar mechanisms of action, carbamate and organophosphate poisoning have similar clinical presentations. The main difference is that the symptoms of poisonings with carbamate insecticides are usually of

shorter duration. Despite this shorter duration, carbamate exposure can be very severe, causing weakness, sweating, dizziness, headache, salivation, nausea, vomiting abdominal pain, diarrhea, blurred vision, tearing, tremors, and, in high doses, death due to paralysis of the nervous system. Children are especially vulnerable to poisoning by aldicarb.

If there are strong clinical indications of acute poisoning with aldicarb, and/or a history of aldicarb exposure, treat the patient immediately. Do not wait for laboratory confirmation with blood plasma pseudocholinesterase and RBC AChE levels. Treatment consists of ensuring a patent airway, improving tissue oxygenation, intravenous administration of atropine sulfate and pralidoxime along with continuous close monitoring of the patient.

Tres Pasitos is generally sold without labels, and one cannot be certain of its contents. No one should ever use pesticides that are unlabeled or do not have a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registration number. The EPA and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) collaborate to investigate and prosecute individuals and businesses that sell illegal pesticides.

One in three households in New York City uses pesticides that may be hazardous to their health, according to a DOHMH report issued last December. Unsafe and illegal products – such as Tempo® (illegal for personal use in New York State), Miracle Chalk and Chinese Chalk, and Tres Pasitos– are also commonly purchased. Use of illegal and potentially hazardous off-the-shelf pesticides is more common in neighborhoods with higher rates of cockroach and rodent infestation (northern Manhattan, southern and central Bronx, and central Brooklyn). Their use is also more prevalent among Hispanic households.

Advise your patients that if they have Tempo®, Tres Pasitos, Cockroach Chalk or any other pesticide that is improperly labeled, seal it in a plastic bag and discard it in a container away from children and pets. You may also encourage them to report any sales of Tres Pasitos, Chinese Chalk, and Tempo® to 3-1-1.

**Cases of pesticide poisoning are reportable under New York State law and New York City Health Code requirements. If you know of or suspect a poisoning, call the Poison Control Center 24 hours a day:**

<b>English-speaking callers</b>	<b>(212) POISONS (764-7667)</b>
<b>Spanish-speaking callers</b>	<b>(212) VENENOS (836-3667)</b>

As always, we appreciate our ongoing partnership with healthcare providers in New York City in reporting cases of poisonings.

Sincerely,

*Daniel E. Kass*  
Daniel E. Kass, MSPH  
Assistant Commissioner  
Bureau of Environmental Surveillance and Policy

*Robert Hoffman*  
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Director  
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## **Pests Can be Controlled Safely: Simple Advice for Safe Cockroach and Mouse Control**

New York City housing and health codes require that landlords maintain apartments free from pests. New Yorkers can report conditions to 3-1-1 if their landlords are not cooperating. Landlords and families can take simple measures to reduce infestations and the use of pesticides:

- Fix leaks and dripping faucets quickly. Keep sinks dry overnight.
- Use caulk and plaster to seal holes and cracks in kitchens and bathroom walls, floors, ceilings and cabinets.
- Store food in sealed containers, and do not leave food, pet food or garbage out.
- Reduce clutter and piling of newspapers and cardboard.
- Remove garbage daily from apartments, and put garbage on the curb as close to pickup time as possible.
- Use only safer pest control products such as boric acid, gels and baits for cockroaches, and glue traps or bait in enclosed tamper-proof containers for rodents. Avoid foggers, bombs and sprays that spread chemicals throughout the home.

For more information on safely controlling pests in the home, visit <http://nyc.gov/health>, and follow the links to “Pesticides in the Home: Safer Pest Control”.