Q: What is alcohol poisoning?

A: Alcohol poisoning is what happens if someone drinks way too much in a short period of time. This is different from being drunk or having a little too much to drink. Alcohol poisoning is life-threatening. A person with alcohol poisoning could stop breathing or choke on his or her own vomit.

Q: What are the symptoms of alcohol poisoning?

A: Some of the symptoms are the same as those for a person who is “just drunk.” For instance, people who have alcohol poisoning can seem confused or have trouble standing up. But some of the other symptoms of alcohol poisoning are more serious. Alcohol poisoning can slow or stop a person’s breathing. It can also cause seizures or an irregular heartbeat.

Call 9-1-1 if the person:

- Stops breathing or goes 10 seconds or more without breathing
- Is breathing very slowly (fewer than 8 breaths in 1 minute)
- Turns blue or very pale, and his or her skin feels cool to the touch
- Has a seizure
- Is passed out and cannot be woken up at all
- Cannot stop vomiting
- Looks very sick

Q: What can they do at the hospital?

A: If someone goes to the emergency room with alcohol poisoning, they can make sure that the person:

- Keeps breathing. (If the person stops breathing, they can put him or her on a breathing machine.)
- Gets fluids through a tube in a vein (IV) if needed. (This can be important if the person has been vomiting a lot.)

Q: What can you do at home to help keep someone safe?

A: For people who have been drinking but do not seem to need emergency care, you can:

- Keep checking their breathing and call 9-1-1 if their breathing slows too much or stops
- Lay them on their side, so that they do not choke on their own vomit if they throw up
- Check them for bumps, bruises, bleeding, or any sign of injury
- Make sure they stay warm (use blankets)