

Keeping Medicine Away From Children

It is important to be attentive to keeping medicine safely stored away from children at all times.

Both prescription and over-the-counter medicines can help manage health conditions and relieve symptoms of illness. While generally safe when used as intended, medicines can have toxic effects if too much is taken or if unintentionally ingested by children.

Each year, approximately 50 000 children younger than 6 years are brought to emergency departments after unintentionally taking medicine when a caregiver was not watching. Most (75%) of these exposures involve 1- or 2-year-old children.

Preventing Unintended Medicine Exposures

Since the Poison Prevention Packaging Act of 1970, child-resistant packaging (eg, a child safety cap) is required for many household products, including medicines, that can be harmful to young children. However, child-resistant packaging is not child-"proof."

- Store all medicine in a place that a young child cannot reach.
- Put medicines up and away after every use. Do not leave medicines on a kitchen counter or at a sick child's bedside, even if you have to give the medicine again in a few hours.
- Make sure the safety cap is locked after every use. There are several different types of safety caps, so follow the instructions to re-lock completely.
- Keep medicines in child-resistant containers. It is safest to keep medicines in their original child-resistant containers, but if you have to transfer medicines to other containers, such as weekly pill organizers or travel bottles, try to choose containers that are child-resistant.
- Keep medicines in child-resistant containers until it is time to take them. It may be tempting to leave the next dose of pills out as a reminder to give or take them, but medicines can look like candy to a young child. Instead, set a timer or reminder on your phone.
- Remind grandparents, friends, and other guests to keep purses, bags, or coats that have medicines in them up and away and out of sight when they are in your home or when you are visiting their homes.
- Teach children about medicines. It is important to teach children what medicine is and why you or another caregiver must be the one to give it to them. Do not tell children that medicine is candy, even if they do not like to take their medicine.

What to Do if an Unintentional Medicine Exposure Happens

Call 911 right away if a child collapses, has a seizure, has trouble breathing, or cannot be awakened.

Medicine safety and young children
Protect children from their own curiosity by following these safety guidelines for all medicine kept in your home.



Keep all medicine up high, out of reach, and out of sight at all times.

- Prescription medicine
- Over-the-counter medicine
- Vitamins and supplements

Keep medicines in their original packaging. Make sure bottle caps are completely closed.



Never leave medicine out on a counter or bedside even if a child requires frequent doses.



Ask visitors if they have medicine in their bag, coat, or purse. Keep their belongings in a safe location.

Be ready in an emergency

If you suspect a child took a medicine by accident, contact Poison Help at 1-800-222-1222.

Call 911 if the child has difficulty breathing or responding.

If you find a child whom you suspect has ingested medicine, check their mouth, collect any medicines and medicine containers that the child might have gotten into, and call the national toll-free Poison Help Line (1-800-222-1222) to get advice from an expert at the nearest poison center.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/medicationsafety/protect/campaign.html
- National Poll on Healthy Aging
www.healthyagingpoll.org/report/safely-storing-medication-around-grandchildren

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Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/medicationsafety/protect/campaign.html>

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