

Winter Hazards

The onset of winter brings with it the cough and cold seasons. Consequently, there may be more medicines in the home than at other times of the year. The Oregon Poison Center and the Oregon Health Sciences University would like to alert you to some of the potential problems associated with incorrect or accidental usage of these medicines.

- ❖ Remember, prevention is the best treatment for poisonings.
- ❖ Keep all medicines in a locked cupboard.
- ❖ Always check with the other parent to prevent double dosing of a child.
- ❖ Be sure to turn the lights on at night to ensure use of correct medicine.

COUGH AND COLD MEDICINES

These medicines contain a combination of antihistamines, decongestants and cough suppressants. Some also contain aspirin and acetaminophen or even alcohol. Used incorrectly these drugs can have a stimulant effect on a child or cause extreme drowsiness. Alcohol, although usually found in small amounts in such medicines, can be very dangerous in children. Alcohol can cause drunkenness, low blood sugar and seizures in children.

ASPIRIN AND NON-ASPIRIN PAIN RELIEVERS

Aspirin, acetaminophen (Tylenol), and ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) are used for pain relief and to reduce a fever. These ingredients are found in pill and liquid form, as well as in children and adult strengths. Some medications contain both aspirin and acetaminophen. In addition, a new extra strength children's tablet can now be purchased. The possibility for confusion is great. When used incorrectly, aspirin can cause bleeding and acetaminophen can cause liver damage. Always read labels for dosage instructions and never exceed dosage recommendations without talking with your doctor. When taking two medicines, always be sure the ingredients are different. Of course, always keep these medicines out of reach of your child. Children have been known to chew through the plastic containers in order to eat medicines.

ANTIBIOTICS

Antibiotics are often prescribed by doctors for infections. Many times they are stored in the refrigerator where children can see them. When the medicine must be kept in the refrigerator, place the bottle in a paper sack closed with masking tape or tied shut with bells on a string or place it in a plastic container with a tight lid. Always call your Poison Center if a child gets into the antibiotics. Some antibiotics can be toxic in large amounts or may cause an allergic reaction.

VITAMINS

Children's vitamins come in multi-colored, multi-flavored, attractive shapes which encourage ingestion by the young and inquisitive. Vitamins may be toxic in an overdose and must be treated as a medicine. Never refer to vitamins as candy. Accidental poisoning can be prevented by storing no more than a weeks supply of vitamins in the kitchen and keeping the larger bottle elsewhere, in a locked box.

THERMOMETERS

Occasionally a thermometer may break in a child's mouth. The mercury found in an oral thermometer is not in a form that can be absorbed into a child's system when swallowed. However, they may be cuts and abrasions from the broken glass. Remove the glass and mercury and check the inside of your child's mouth for bleeding. Give a glass of milk or water as you would for any accidental ingestion and call the Poison Center.