

# Medication Safety Tips

Everything you need to know to keep your kids safe around medicine.

Whether it's diaper rash cream, over-the-counter pain killers or a prescription for an illness, medicine is common to have around the house to keep us healthy. Here are tips to keep children safe around medicine

## Store Medicines Safely

- Put all medicine up and away and out of sight including your own. Make sure that all medicine and vitamins are stored out of reach and out of sight of children.
- Consider places where kids get into medicine. Kids get into medicine in all sorts of places, like in purses and nightstands. Place purses and bags in high locations, and avoid leaving medicine on a nightstand or dresser.
- Consider products you might not think about as medicine. Most parents store medicine up and away—or at least the products they consider to be medicine. They may not think about products such as diaper rash remedies, vitamins or eye drops as medicine, but they actually are and need to be stored safely.
- Close your medicine caps tightly after every use. Choose child-resistant caps for medicine bottles, if you're able to. If pill boxes or non-child resistant caps are the only option, it's even more important to store these containers up high and out of sight when caring for kids. And remember, child-resistant does not mean child-proof, and some children will still be able to get into medicine given enough time and persistence.
- Be alert to visitors' medicine. Guests in your home may not be thinking about the medicine they brought with them in their belongings. When you have guests in your home, offer to put purses, bags and coats out of reach of children to protect their property from a curious child.



*Medications are the leading cause of child poisoning. Every year, more than 59,000 children go to an emergency room for medicine poisoning. That's one child every nine minutes.*

- Be alert to medicine in places your child visits. You know to store medicine safely in your home, but do you ever think about medicine safety when your child isn't at home? Asking people your child visits to put their medicines in a safe place works for some parents, but it may feel socially awkward to others. Another option is to take a look around to see if any medicines are stored within reach and deal with any risks in sight.
- Even if you are tempted to keep it handy, put medicine out of reach after every use. When you need to give another dose in just a few hours, it may be tempting to keep medicine close at hand. But accidents can happen fast, and it only takes a few seconds for children to get into medicine that could make them very sick. Put medicine up and away after every use. And if you need a reminder, set an alarm on your watch or cell phone, or write yourself a note.



## Give Medicines Safely

- Use the dosing device that comes with the medicine. Proper dosing is important, particularly for young children. Kitchen spoons aren't all the same, and a teaspoon or tablespoon used for cooking won't measure the same amount as the dosing device.
- Keep all medicines in their original packages and containers.
- Take the time to read the label and follow the directions. Even if you have used the medicine before, sometimes the directions change about how much medicine to give.
- Even if your child seems really sick, don't give more medicine than the label says. It won't help your child feel better faster, and it may cause harm.
- Read the label and know what's in the medicine. Check the active ingredients listed on the label. Make sure you don't give your child more than one medicine with the same active ingredient, because it puts your child at risk for an overdose.

## Communicate to Caregivers

- Write clear instructions caregivers about your child's medicine. When other caregivers are giving your child medicine, they need to know what medicine to give, how much to give and when to give it.

## Get Rid of Medicines Safely

- Clean out your medicine cabinet. Reduce the risk of kids getting into medicine by getting rid of unused or expired medicine. Many communities have a medicine take-back program. This is an easy way to get rid of your unused or expired medicines.
- To dispose of it yourself, pour the medicine into a sealable plastic bag. If the medicine is a pill, add water to dissolve it. Then add kitty litter, sawdust or coffee grounds to the plastic bag. You can add anything that mixes with the medicine to make it less appealing for children or pets.
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says that certain medicines are so dangerous they should be flushed down the toilet.

## Talk to Your Kids about Medication Safety

- Teach your child that medicine should always be given by an adult. It's important for kids to know that they should not take medicine on their own. Parents and caregivers can help make sure they are taking it correctly.
  - Don't refer to medicine as candy. While saying medicine is candy may make it easier to get your child to take medicine, it may encourage them to try it on their own.
  - Model responsible medication behavior. What kids see us doing is a much stronger message than what we tell them to do. Make sure to store medicine out of reach of children, read drug facts and prescription labels before taking medicine and follow the recommended dose.
  - Educate your pre-teens and teens on how to read an over-the-counter drug facts or prescription label. Take the time to teach them about each section of a drug facts label and its purpose. For a great resource on this topic, visit [www.scholastic.com/otcmedsafety](http://www.scholastic.com/otcmedsafety).
  - Communicate to kids the importance of only taking medicine that is meant for them. Taking medicine that belongs to someone else or misusing medicine (even OTCs) can cause harm.
  - Teach your child that medicine labels are rules, not guidelines. Be sure your child knows that taking more than the recommended dose will not help them get relief any faster, and it could hurt them.
  - Check in with your pre-teens and teens and talk about medicine they are taking regularly. Even kids who need to take medicine daily may make errors in dose or dosing frequency, so it is important to communicate with them regularly about taking medicine responsibly.
- ## Put the Poison Help Number in Your Phone
- Put the toll-free Poison Help line (1-800-222-1222) in your phones. You can also put the number on your refrigerator or another place in your home where babysitters and caregivers can see it. And remember, the Poison Help line is not just for emergencies, you can call with questions about how to take or give medicine.
  - If your child has collapsed, is not breathing, or has a seizure, call 911.