



Medication Safety – Keeping Children Safe From Opioids and Other Pharmaceuticals at Home

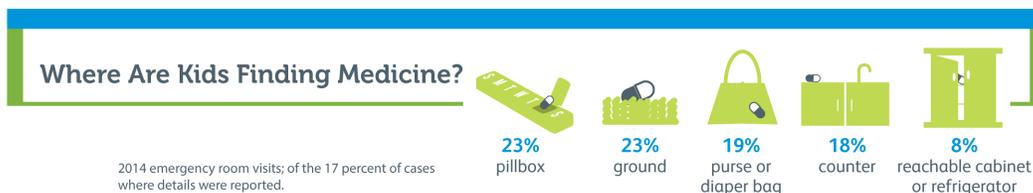
Medication safety at home is not just an issue for March's Poison Prevention Week; keeping medications up and away from children is a 365-days-a-year responsibility. Safe Kids Worldwide has reported for the past three years that 60,000 children annually are seen in emergency departments because they found and ingested medications—most often those meant for adults. That amounts to four busloads of children daily or a call to a poison center almost every minute of every day.

A 2017 medication study and literature review conducted by Safe Kids Worldwide highlighted that parental perception of risk and the reality of what children can and will do are very different. Parents believe that putting medications up on counters and watching children closely is prevention enough. But data from national poison centers document that in about half of the reported cases children moved a chair, toy, or other object to reach a medication left “just out of reach.” Children move quickly and learn new skills daily. Many parents who bring their child to an emergency department for non-intentional medical ingestion report only looking or stepping away “for a minute.”



Combined with childhood curiosity, medications in sight, plus lack of locked storage, plus the number of prescription/over-the-counter/illicit drugs available in homes today equal as many as 440,000 calls to poison control centers annually. Prevention is key, and these simple steps can be taken to make a home a safer place for children of all ages:

- Store all medications (prescription and over-the-counter), vitamins, and supplements up and away and out of sight and reach AT ALL TIMES.
- Keep medicine in its original child-resistant packaging. The label has important information for appropriate dosing and what to do if the child opens it and ingests the medication.
- Keep family members' and visitors' purses, bags, and coats out of the reach of kids, as they may contain medicine.
- Instead of keeping medicine within reach and handy, use safe reminder tools to help you remember when to take doses, and to make sure the right amount of medicine is taken. Charts are available from www.safekids.org. Digital calendar reminders and smart phone apps can also help.
- If you are administering medication to someone else, use a medication schedule to make sure you give the right amount of medicine at the right time.
- Put the poison help number (1-800-222-1222) into your phone and post it visibly at home.



There are more resources available for parents and caregivers to ensure medication safety at home. The Maryland Poison Center has educational materials for both health care providers and the public. The March/April 2016 issue of the Poison Prevention Press focused on the reality of child-resistant (not child-proof) medication containers. Subscribe to Poison Prevention Press and read past issues at www.mdpoison.com. Public educational materials can be ordered online from the Maryland Poison Center and downloaded from Safe Kids at www.safekids.org under the “Our Work At Home” tab. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has also launched a prevention campaign, “Up and Away, Out of Sight,” and has additional educational materials at www.upandaway.org.