

Medicine safety 101



Medications — or medicines — are the leading cause of child poisoning. In fact, an average of one child every eight minutes is seen in an emergency room for medicine poisoning. The Kohl's Cares Grow Safe & Healthy program, in partnership with the Wisconsin Poison Center, has compiled the following important tips to keep your family safe:

What is a medicine? Prescription and some over-the-counter cold and pain medicines usually come to mind first. Health products like vitamins, eye and eardrops, hand sanitizer, diaper rash creams and ointments are also medicines, and should be treated as such.

Store it safely. In 67 percent of emergency room visits for medicine poisoning, the medicine was left within reach of a child, such as in a purse, on a counter or dresser, or on the ground.

- Store all medicine out of sight and out of reach of children.
- Remind grandparents and visitors to your home to store their medicine up and away.
- Keep all medication in its original packaging.

Understand medicine labels. Read and understand the entire label before taking or dispensing a medicine. The “Drug Facts” label on the package is formatted to tell you the ingredients, risks, storage information and dosing directions. If you have questions or don't understand something, call your doctor or pharmacist before dispensing.

Measure medicine carefully. Use the dosing device that comes with the medicine to prevent dosing errors. 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. In the middle of the night, turn on the light and put glasses on if needed before measuring medication.

Talk to your kids about medicine safety:

- It's important for kids to know that they should not take medicine on their own. Teach them that medicine should only be given by a trusted adult.
- 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.
- Educate preteens and teens on how to read an over-the-counter drug facts or prescription label. Make sure they know to only take medication that is prescribed to them; not other people.

Call the Wisconsin Poison Center for help and information. Did you know that poison centers across the country are staffed by doctors, nurses, pharmacists and toxicologists who can help answer questions about medications? They are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and can provide help over the phone. Put the toll-free number into your home and cell phone: 1-800-222-1222. Post it on your refrigerator and where baby sitters and caregivers can see it. And remember, the poison help number is *not* just for emergencies.

