



Consumers Can Help Prevent Harmful Medication Incidents

SafeMedicationUse.ca Newsletter

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Misconceptions about Medicines That Could Be Deadly: Part 1

This is the first in a series of newsletters that will discuss three common misconceptions about medicines. These misconceptions were identified in an ISMP Canada [analysis](#) that looked at errors with medicines that resulted in death. This particular analysis looked at errors that happened in a person's home or where medicines were given by a person without professional healthcare training.

Misconception One: It doesn't matter where I keep my medicines.

Proper storage of medicines is important – most people know that exposing medicines to too much heat and moisture (for example, in the bathroom or some areas of the kitchen) can make them less effective. But proper storage is also needed to make sure a medicine is used only by the person who is supposed to take it. Medicines that end up in the wrong hands may not be used as they were intended and can cause harm.

Through work with provincial agencies that investigate unexpected deaths, ISMP Canada learned of an incident in which improper storage of a medicine led to a child's death. In this tragic case, a young child accidentally drank from a bottle containing orange juice and methadone. Methadone is an opioid medicine that is often mixed with orange juice before it is taken. The family member who was using this drug had taken part of the dose, and then left the remainder of the mixture in a place that was within the child's reach. One of the child's parents observed the child drinking the juice, but did not realize it contained methadone. The child could not be awakened the next morning and later died in hospital. This case highlights the need for proper storage of medicines, even while you're in the process of using it. If you're not storing and disposing of your medicines safely, you or your family members are at risk.

SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following advice to help you prevent events like the one described above:

- Store all medicines in a secure location, out of the reach of children and adults who may become confused. Consider using cabinets with safety locks, or locked boxes, to store your medicines. This is especially important for opioid medicines such as methadone. Even a single dose of an opioid medicine can be very harmful for a child or for a person who has never taken opioids.
- Teach children to always **ask a grown-up** before eating or drinking anything.
- Never leave a child alone with any medicine. If you need to answer the door or pick up the phone when you are using a medicine, first put the medicine in a safe place or take the product with you.

SafeMedicationUse.ca also has the following advice about storing and disposing of medicines safely:

- Most medicines are best stored in a dry, cool area, away from sources of moisture and heat. Ask your pharmacist if you are not sure about how to properly store your medicine.
- Store the medicines for each family member in a different location or in a separate basket. This will help to prevent mix-ups in medicines between different family members.
- Always store medicines in their original containers. Do not mix different medicines in the same container.
- To prevent accidental poisoning of children or pets, be careful when disposing of medicines. Also, certain medicines, such as patches, require special handling during disposal. Many pharmacies or municipal waste programs offer a medicine disposal service. If you are not sure about how to dispose of a medicine, ask your pharmacist.

Read our [medication safety tips on preventing poisonings that occur at home](http://safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/tips_homesafety.html).
http://safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/tips_homesafety.html

Tips for Practitioners:

- Educate patients about how to store medicines properly.
- Stress the importance of keeping medicines in a secure place at all times, away from children and adults who may become confused.
- Discuss with your patients any special storage and disposal instructions for particular medicines.



Medication Safety bulletins contribute to Global Patient Safety Alerts

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