

Help Prevent Medication Incidents

A component of the Canadian Medication Incident Reporting and Prevention System (CMIRPS).

Volume 2, Issue 3

Newsletter

June 27, 2011

Preventing Errors with Children's Medicines Part 1 - At the Doctor's Office and Pharmacy

Most parents and home caregivers know that it is important to take extra care when administering medicines to children. The small doses that children need can be difficult to measure and difficult to give. Also, mistakes with medicines for children are more likely to cause harm than mistakes with medicines for adults. In a recent study, researchers visited the homes of children with chronic conditions. The researchers visited 52 homes and discovered 61 medication errors. Half of these errors could have harmed a child, and nine of the errors had already caused harm.(1)

This newsletter is the first in a series with suggestions to help you prevent errors with children's medicines. It provides you with some tips on things to do and questions to ask when a medicine is prescribed and dispensed for your child.

At the Doctor's Office and the Pharmacy

- Keep an up-to-date list of all medicines that your child is taking, including over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal medicines. Bring the list with you any time your child receives health care.
- Be sure that healthcare providers know your child's weight and whether your child has any allergies.
- Learn as much as you can about your child's medicine and your child's medical conditions. For some suggestions on questions you should ask, see Table 1.
- For liquid medicines, always use a proper measuring device such as an oral syringe, a special measuring spoon, or a medicine cup. Be sure you know how to measure the dose accurately. [Read more...](#)
- Ask the pharmacist to verify that the dose is correct for your child's weight and medical condition.
- It may be hard to remember everything you are told about your child's medicine. Ask for written information that you can check at home. If you write down any special instructions yourself, read the notes back to your healthcare provider. You can also ask if there is any useful information online. Drug manufacturers often provide information for consumers on their websites.
- Be sure you know who to contact, and how to contact them, if you have any questions or concerns at home.

Table 1 Examples of Questions to Ask about Your Child's Medicine
What is the name of my child's medicine?
Why is this medicine being given to my child?
My child is already taking other medicines. Is it okay to give this new medicine with the others?
Is this medicine safe given my child's allergy (or allergies)?
How much medicine do I give?
How can I measure the medicine?
How often should I give the medicine, and for how long?
What should I do if I forget to give the medicine?
What should I do if my child refuses to take the medicine, spits out the medicine, or swallows only a small amount?
Are there side effects that I should watch for? What should I do if they happen?

Coming soon in our next SafeMedicationUse newsletter:

Preventing Errors with Children's Medicine: At Home and Away from Home!

References

1. Walsh, K.E. et. al., Medication errors in the homes of children with chronic conditions. Arch Dis Child 2011; 96:581-586.