

# poison prevention press

## Cough and Cold Medicines

Did you notice that children's cough and cold medicines did not make the top 10 list? In 2008, cough and cold medicines were #8 on the list. From 2004-2007, they were the sixth most common call. Why the drop in calls to the MPC? In 2008, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a public health advisory stating that cough and cold medicines are not recommended for use in children under the age of 4. Product manufacturers voluntarily changed their labels to reflect this recommendation. Some products were removed from the market completely.

### Did you know that...

- In 2012, the MPC received more calls about ibuprofen than acetaminophen in children under the age of 6 years
- In 2012, the MPC managed 87% of calls about children under the age of 6 years at home

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## MPC Top 10 Exposures in Young Children

What is the most frequent call the Maryland Poison Center (MPC) receives? The answer to this question varies greatly depending on the age group. Of the more than 34,000 human exposure calls received by the MPC in 2012, 44% were about children who were under 6 years of age. Let's take a look at the top 10 substances the MPC was called about in this age group.

- 10. Plants** Children have access to plants in any number of places. They are curious about the leaves, flowers and berries. Some berries even look like berries they have as a snack! Plants usually do not cause serious problems, but they can make a child uncomfortable. Know the names of plants in and around your home.
- 9. Antimicrobials** Antibiotics and antiviral medicines taken by mouth, as well as ointments and drops for the skin, eyes and ears, are included in this category. Often they must be stored in the refrigerator so children have easy access to them. Ointments, creams and drops do not have child-resistant caps, leading to easy access as well.
- 8. Pesticides** Chemicals used in and around the house to get rid of insects and rodents are included in this category. In addition, insect repellants that we apply to our skin and clothes are included. Use products exactly as instructed on the label.
- 7. Vitamins** In many households, at least one family member is taking a vitamin of some sort. While excess amounts of many vitamins are handled naturally by the body, some can be harmful in large quantities.
- 6. Antihistamines** This category includes medicines for allergies, sleep and stomach problems. Antihistamines used for the stomach usually will not cause a problem when children get into them. However, antihistamines used for allergy and sleep can cause symptoms in children. This category does not include antihistamines found in cough and cold medicines.
- 5. Topical medicines** Diaper rash products lead this category and usually do not cause a problem. Other medicines used on the skin for cold sores, itching, and acne can be more harmful. These products should be stored like other medicines: out of sight and reach of small children.
- 4. Foreign bodies and toys** Silica gel, toys, bubble blowing solution, coins, and glow sticks make up this category. Some of these are harmless, others cause mild symptoms and others are simply choking hazards. Magnets found in toys or alone can cause serious problems if more than one is swallowed.
- 3. Analgesics** Pain and fever reducers are found in most households. There are adult and children's formulations. Some of these exposures are the result of dosing errors while others are the result of children getting into the medicine. Adult medicines should not be used in children. Dosing instructions found on the label should be followed exactly. Use the dosing tool provided with the children's medicine to give the correct dose.
- 2. Household cleaners** All homes have cleaning products for the dishes, laundry, floors, windows, toilets etc. Even if the cleaning product is labeled as "natural", it can cause symptoms if it is ingested. Store all cleaning products out of sight and out of reach of children.
- 1. Cosmetics and personal care products** It is not surprising that this category is responsible for the largest number of calls about children. Common in all households and often stored in plain sight, children have access to lotions, make-up, deodorant, toothpaste, soap, etc. Special attention should be paid to alcohol-containing products like hand sanitizer, mouthwash and perfume.

The take home message is that children under the age of 6 years will get into common household items. Each situation is unique so don't guess. Call the experts at the poison center to find out what is best for your child if a poisoning or overdose occurs.