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ONSET OF WINTER BRINGS HIGHER RISK OF POISONINGS DUE TO MISUSE OF COLD AND FLU MEDICATIONS

PORTLAND, Ore. — The winter season brings with it more colds and coughs. Consequently, there may be more medicines in the home than any other time of the year. The Oregon Poison Center at Oregon Health & Science University would like to alert parents of potential hazards associated with incorrect or accidental usage of medicines.

- Cough and cold medicines contain a combination of antihistamines, decongestants and cough suppressants. Some also contain aspirin and acetaminophen or even alcohol. Used incorrectly, these drugs can have a stimulant effect on a child or cause extreme drowsiness. Alcohol, although usually found in small amounts in such medicines, can cause drunkenness, low blood sugar and seizures in children.
- Aspirin, non-aspirin pain relievers and acetaminophen are used for pain relief and to reduce a fever. When used incorrectly, aspirin can cause bleeding and acetaminophen can cause liver damage. Always read labels for dosage instructions and never exceed dosage recommendations without consulting your doctor. When taking two medicines, make sure that the ingredients are different.
- Antibiotics are often stored in the refrigerator where children can see them. Some antibiotics can be toxic in large amounts or cause an allergic reaction. If the medication must be kept in the refrigerator, place the bottle in a paper sack closed with masking tape or tied shut with bells on a string, or place in a plastic container with a tight, childproof lid.
- Children's vitamins come in multi-colored, multi-flavored, attractive shapes which encourage ingestion by children. Vitamins may be toxic in an overdose and must be treated as medicine. Accidental poisoning can be prevented by storing no more than a week's supply of vitamins in the kitchen.
- Thermometers can occasionally break in a child's mouth. The mercury in oral thermometers is not in a form that can be absorbed when swallowed. However, there may be cuts and abrasions from the broken glass. If a break occurs, remove the glass and mercury and check the inside of your child's mouth for bleeding. Call the Poison Center for further instructions.

Always make sure to keep medicines out of reach of your children. If you suspect your child has been poisoned call the Oregon Poison Center at OHSU:
1 800-222-1222.

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