

Dear Parents/ Guardians:

Many parents and staff members have questions regarding the use of medications. The following is some information from local and national pediatric experts about the use of medication in young children.

People in the United States spend millions of dollars on over-the-counter (OTC) medications. Many of these medications are unnecessary, and in the case of young children these medicines often produce unexpected side effects, instead of providing relief to bothersome symptoms.

In January 2008, the American Academy of Pediatrics supported an advisory by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This advisory recommended that OTC cough and cold medications should not be used for children under age 2 because of the risk of life threatening side effects. After consulting with the FDA, manufacturers of these medicines updated the labeling to state “do not use” in children under 4 years of age.

It is recommended that parents discuss the use of OTC medications with their health care provider before giving any medication to their child.

Use of Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medication for Common Symptoms:

- Do not use OTC cough and cold medicines for children under age 4.
- If your child is playing and sleeping normally, OTC medicines are not needed.
- Always read and follow medicine labels exactly and use the measuring device that comes with the medicine.
- Do not give a medicine intended for adults to a child.
- Never use medicine to make a child sleepy.
- Check the medication label and read the expiration dates. Expired medications can lose their strength and can be harmful.
- Fever-reducing medication can be given for fever over 102° and if the child is uncomfortable. Remember, fever can be the body’s way to fight infection.
- Be careful not to casually use fever-reducing medication. Combining acetaminophen and ibuprofen is generally not recommended. Combining can cause confusion, dosage errors, and poisoning.
- Children through age 21 years should not take aspirin or products with aspirin, if they have chickenpox or any cold, cough, or sore throat symptoms.
- Viral illnesses respond well to rest, fluids and comfort measures.

Use of Antibiotics:

- More than 90% of infections, including colds, coughs, croup, and diarrhea, are due to viruses.
- Antibiotics have no effect on viruses
- Antibiotics are strong medicines that kill bacteria, such as strep throat and other bacterial infections.
- Continue antibiotics until the bottle is empty, even though your child may feel well. Stopping the antibiotic early may cause the illness to return.
- All antibiotics have additional side effects, such as wiping out your normal protective bacteria and replacing them with bacteria resistant to the antibiotic.
- If you think your child is having a reaction to a medicine, call your healthcare provider before giving your child an additional dose.

Guidelines for Safe Use of Medication:

- Most medicines can cause poisoning. Keep them out of reach of children. Do not remove child-proof caps on the container.
- Children should understand **adults are in charge of medicines**. It should not be referred to as “candy”.
- Give the correct dose. Use a measuring spoon, medicine spoon or syringe. One teaspoon = 5ml (cc). Kitchen teaspoons & tablespoons are **not** accurate; they hold 2-7ml (cc) and should not be used.
- Give the medicine at the prescribed times. If you forget a dose, give it as soon as possible and give the next dose at the correct time interval following the late dose.

- Give medicines to treat symptoms only when your child has symptoms that are causing discomfort. These medicines do not need to be given continuously. Talk with your health care provider.



What to do if Your Child Refuses to Take Their Medicine

- Some medications do not taste very good. Your child can suck on a popsicle beforehand to help numb the taste buds on the tongue. You can serve the medicine cold to reduce the taste; or you can offer your child's favorite drink to help wash it down.
- Put your child in a sitting position and pour or drip the medicine onto the back of the tongue. Don't squirt it into the pouch inside the cheek.
- If your child is not cooperating, however, you must place the liquid beyond the teeth or gum line. Don't squirt it forcefully into the back of the throat, because of the danger of its going into the windpipe and causing choking. If you drip the medicine in slowly, you can avoid gagging or choking.
- If the medication is not essential (such as most OTC medication) then discontinue it. If you are not sure, call your health care provider.
- If the medication is essential, be firm, help them take it and give a reason for the need. Praise and hug your child for all cooperation.
- Call your child's healthcare provider, if your child vomits the medicine more than once or if you are unable to get your child to take an essential medicine.

If Your Child Requires Medication While at Child Care or School:

- All prescription and over-the-counter medication given in child care or school require written authorization from your health care provider, as well as parent written consent. This is a child care licensing requirement.
- Medication authorization forms are available from the child care or school.
- Instructions from your health care provider must include the child's name, birthdate, current date, purpose of the medication, dosage, how to administer (route), specific time interval, length of time the medication needs to be given, possible side effects and any special instructions.
- All medication must be brought in the original labeled container.
- Medication prepared in a bottle or "cup" may not be left with program staff. Vitamins are like any other medication and may not be left with your child.
- Program staff involved in medication administration receives special training and in child care centers or schools is supervised by a nurse consultant (RN).
- Program staff is not authorized to determine when an "as needed" medication is to be given. Specific instructions are necessary. For children with chronic health conditions, this can be determined in collaboration with the consulting RN.

Should your child need to take medication, either at home at school or at child care, be sure to talk with the program director. When your child is well enough to return to school/childcare, the staff may be able to assist you in monitoring your child during this time, be able to share information about your child's symptoms and how they may be responding to the medication and other comfort measures.

References

- American Academy of Pediatrics, <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/jan08coughandcold.htm>
- Consumer Healthcare Products Association <http://www.otcsafety.org>
- Schmitt, B.D., *Your Child's Health*, Second revision, Bantam Books, New York, NY, 2005.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.