

UW Health: Medicine storage safety critical to preventing accidental poisoning in kids

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MADISON, Wis. – Each year UW Health’s BerbeeWalsh Emergency Department sees hundreds of unintentional poison ingestion cases in kids younger than 10 years old.

This week marks National Poison Prevention Week, which is designed to spotlight the dangers of poisoning and how to keep it from happening.

Common poisonings among children are due to medications and supplements, and 42% of all poisonings occur in children younger than 5, according to the [American Association of Poison Control Centers](#).

In 2020-21, UW Health saw 175 unintentional poison cases – including 147 in kids younger than 5 years old – many from pharmaceutical products, according to Nick Zetes, outpatient pharmacy coordinator, UW Health Kids.

Storing medication safely, giving medication safely, disposing of medication properly, and knowing the 24 hour per day resources available are key to prevention, he said.

“If a child gets their hands on adult medication, that could lead to a scary trip to the emergency room because little kids’ bodies process medications differently than adults,” Zetes said. “Symptoms could include nausea, vomiting and in severe cases, death,”

UW Health Kids experts recommend the following guidelines from [Safe Kids Worldwide](#):

- Pills can look like candy to small children so keep all medicine out of their reach and sight.
- Remember child-resistant packaging is not child-proof. So put medicine away after every use.
- As your kid learns and grows, you will need to assess and change where you keep the medicine because they are more mobile and curious.
- Share medicine safety information with family and friends. When kids have a babysitter or others visiting the home, it is important all the adults know how to keep kids safe around medicine.

Another troubling trend health professionals are seeing is intentional poison ingestion. In 2020-21, UW Health Kids saw nearly 200 intentional poisoning ingestions in kids 11 years old and older in the emergency department, many from medication, Zetes said.

“Parents and caregivers need to save the poison health number, 1-800-222-1222, in their phone,” he said. “Specialists at poison control centers are available around the clock to provide free, confidential, expert advice about poison emergencies and answer questions about medicine.”

A recorded interview with Zetes is available.