



Family Safety & Health

Don't neglect
YOUR GUMS

Sharing the road with
SNOWPLOWS

How to
LIFT A CHILD
without hurting yourself

GOING SHOPPING?
Keep it safe

Debunking some common
HEALTH AND SAFETY MYTHS

The ABCs of
FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

A dose of caution

Grandparents can help protect kids
from medication-related poisonings

A dose of caution

Grandparents can help protect kids from medication-related poisonings

BY SUSAN VARGAS

Grandparents can be an important part of a child's life. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 7 million grandparents, or about 10 percent, live with at least one minor grandchild. And in 2011, grandparents were the primary source of child care for 21 percent of preschool-age kids.

Add the growth of medication use among older Americans and it's easy to see why keeping medicine out of kids' hands requires vigilance. A study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that in 2011 and 2012, 39 percent of seniors were taking five or more prescription medications. That's up from 24 percent in 1999 and 2000.

"There is more medicine in the home today than ever before, which increases the potential risk of accidental medicine poisoning to children," said Emily Samuel, senior program manager at nonprofit organization Safe Kids Worldwide.

The risks are serious ... and easy to overlook

Whether grandparents are living with their grandkids, caring for them or just visiting, attention to medication safety is important. A drug that's beneficial to an adult may be extremely dangerous to a child, even in small amounts, according to Dr. Daniel Budnitz, medical

officer and director of the Medication Safety Program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"For example, what might be a normal therapeutic dose of a pain medication for an adult might be enough to make a child stop breathing – particularly a very young or small child," Budnitz said.

Each year, about 60,000 children age 6 and younger are treated in emergency rooms after getting into medicines, according to a 2015 study by Budnitz and colleagues that was published in the journal *Pediatrics*. What's more, a Safe Kids Worldwide analysis found that in 48 percent of these ER visits for which the source of the drug was known, the medication the child took belonged to a grandparent.

To prevent medication poisoning, it's helpful to understand some of the reasons why they're so common.

Kids are curious. "Young children explore their world by picking things up and putting them in their mouth," said Budnitz, who pointed out that pills can be particularly alluring if they're brightly colored, look like candy or are flavored. "But even the bitter-tasting, plain white

Where do kids find medicines?

Pillboxes: 23 percent
Ground: 23 percent
Purses or diaper bags: 19 percent
Counters: 18 percent
Reachable cabinets or refrigerators: 8 percent

Source: Safe Kids Worldwide





pills can find their way into a curious child's mouth."

Poisons go incognito. To a layperson, it isn't obvious which products present significant dangers to children.

"The risks really depend on what the specific medicine is," Budnitz said. "On the mild end, taking too much of some medicines might give you an upset stomach, or maybe hardly any reaction at all. But other medicines, even in relatively small doses (like a single pill), can actually kill a young child."

Products we might not think of as dangerous – or even think of as medicine – can pose risks, sometimes serious ones. These include over-the-counter medicines, dietary supplements and vitamins, Budnitz said.

Safe Kids Worldwide points out that a number of products that may not seem risky but can pose significant dangers to kids, such as pain/fever medications, allergy medicines, diaper rash ointments, eye drops, laxatives and vapor rubs containing camphor.

Play it safe with all medications

Because it can be difficult to identify which products are dangerous to kids and which present only mild risks, experts recommend grandparents and other caregivers take steps to keep kids safe from all medicines (whether prescription or over the counter), vitamins and dietary supplements. Tips include:

Store medicines in child-resistant containers (and keep the caps locked). "It is best to keep medicine in its original packaging and request child-resistant packaging when available," Samuel said. If child-resistant packaging isn't available, you require easy-open packaging (because of arthritis, for example) or you use daily pill minders (which Budnitz noted are generally not child-resistant), you'll need to take extra care to keep your medicines away from children.

And even if all your medicine is in child-resistant containers, caution is still necessary. Always make sure the safety cap is locked, and remember that even child-resistant packaging is not childproof.



“Given enough time,” Budnitz said, “a number of children will be able to open those containers up and take that medicine on their own.”

Keep medicines out of reach (and out of sight). Whether you’re at home or traveling, always be mindful of proper medication storage. “Children often find medicine in places that are within their reach, such as pillboxes, on the ground, in a purse or bag, or on a counter,” Samuel said. “Medicine should be stored up and away, out of children’s reach and sight, such as in a cabinet or drawer above counter height.” Remember to return each medication to its proper place when you’re done with it, she said, even if you’ll need it again soon.

Check your pockets, purse and jacket. “A grandparent who is visiting, even for an afternoon, might take pills with them in their purse or pocket and forget that they have a pillbox that is not child-resistant,” Budnitz said. Before you leave, he recommends checking the places you normally carry medicines, moving them to more secure locations and leaving behind any you won’t need.

Don’t use pills as reminders. A common poisoning scenario involves adults leaving medications on a counter or nightstand to remind themselves to take it, Budnitz

said. “Instead of using the medicine itself as a reminder,” he advised, “leave a sticky note on the refrigerator, or set a reminder or alarm on your watch or phone.”

Always be prepared. Samuel suggests grandparents and other caregivers keep the 24-hour Poison Help hotline number, (800) 222-1222, stored on their phones and posted in an easy-to-see location at home. She also recommends consulting Safe Kids Worldwide’s Medication Safety Checklist (safekids.org/checklist/medication-safety-checklist) for additional prevention tips.

“You’re not a bad parent or grandparent if a kid is exploring the environment – it’s just what they do,” Budnitz said. “Our job is just to keep medicines up and away and out of sight, so that when they do explore, they don’t find pills.” FS&H

Keep medication ‘Up and Away and Out of Sight’

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has partnered with other government agencies, medical associations and nonprofit groups on “Up and Away and Out of Sight,” a campaign to promote safe medication storage. Find tips, brochures and more at upandaway.org.