



For Immediate Release

**Contact: Donna Lorenson
202-974-5010**

**Back-To-School Is Also Time to Think About
Giving Children OTC Medicines Correctly**
Health Group Urges Parents to Remember the Three R's

Washington, DC; August 10, 2002 – As many Americans turn their attention to back-to-school preparations, a coalition of health-related organizations urges parents whose children will encounter the inevitable coughs and colds during the next school year to “be medwise” when giving any OTC medicine.

As part of its ongoing *Be MedWise* public education campaign about the appropriate use of OTC medicines, the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPPIE) today issued this practical advice: Just as there are the “three Rs” involved in schooling, remember the “three Rs” of using medicines correctly: risk, respect, and responsibility.

“The OTC medicines formulated for children are safe when taken as directed and that is why parents need the simple facts to give the right medicines in the right way,” said Linda Bernstein, Pharm.D., Clinical Professor of Pharmacy at the University of California, San Francisco, School of Pharmacy and an advisor to NCPPIE. “When parents go shopping for their children’s clothes and school supplies, they compare the different products to make the most informed choice. We need to encourage the same level of care, and more, in selecting and giving OTC medicines to children.”

Underscoring the need for this new advice, a survey of 1,011 adult Americans conducted for NCPPIE by Harris Interactive and released in early 2002 finds that many Americans are unclear about the relationship between a child’s weight and age in determining dosages of OTC medicines. In addition, the poll finds that parents are having trouble understanding about different concentrations. This matter is especially significant because infant formulations are often more concentrated than the medicines formulated for older children.

“We are using this back-to-school season as an opportunity to get parents’ attention and to give them the tools to be medwise,” said W. Ray Bullman, executive vice president of NCPPIE.

More

To help parents and caregivers select and use children's OTC medicines correctly, NCPIE has developed these ten tips to "be medwise:"

1. When in doubt, ask first. Your child's health is too important for guesswork. So any time you have a question about which OTC medicine is best for your child or how and when to give the medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist first.
2. Make sure the pediatrician knows about all the OTC medicines your child takes before he or she writes a new prescription. Similarly, if your child takes prescription medicines, check with your pediatrician or pharmacist before giving your child an OTC product.
3. Know your child's weight so you can give the proper dose of the medicine as recommended on the product label. Most pediatricians and pharmacists agree that the child's weight is the best way to determine the correct dose. For this reason, health professionals often recommend that parents keep an accurate scale in the house so that they can check the child's weight before giving OTC medicines.
4. Follow the directions on the label carefully. Because OTC drugs are serious medicines that can do harm if taken incorrectly, always read the entire label information before giving a child any OTC product. In this way, you will be certain that you have selected the right product, understand the dosing instructions, and are aware of any warnings or precautions that could apply.
5. Use the specific dropper, dosing cup or other device that comes packaged with your child's medicine. Because kitchen spoons and other household utensils vary in size and are not accurate enough to measure doses of medicines, using them can result in giving your child either too large or too small a dose of the medication. The same thing can happen when you use a dosing device from another children's medicine.
6. If using multiple OTC medicines, you have to watch for both duplicate ingredients and usage. First check the active ingredient(s) used in each OTC medicine and make sure that you are not giving your child more than one product with the same active ingredient without first checking with a healthcare professional. Because many cough and cold preparations contain the same active ingredient as pain relievers, it is possible to give a child two different products that contain the same active ingredient without realizing it. Second, check for usage duplication. For example, two cold medicines may contain different active ingredients, but both of those ingredients act as fever reducers. That's usage duplication, and it should also be avoided. To play it safe, read the "Drug Facts" label and compare. Don't be afraid to ask your pediatrician or pharmacist for advice on product selection.

More

7. Give babies and children only those medicines that are especially formulated for their weight and age. Cutting adult strength tablets in half or trying to estimate a child's dose of an adult-strength liquid can result in an accidental overdose. Similarly, giving older children liquid medicines that are especially formulated for babies can also lead to dosing errors.
8. Keep in mind that most OTC medicines are for temporary relief of minor symptoms. If the condition persists or gets worse contact your pediatrician.
9. Don't give medicines in the dark. This is often a problem because children get sick at night, and the parents can make a mistake reading the dosing device if they can't see well.
10. Teach children that OTC medicines are not candy and they should not touch, sniff, or taste them on their own. Only let children take OTC medicines from a responsible adult. Keep all medicines and household products out of children's reach.

Launched in January 2002, the *Be MedWise* campaign employs a wide variety of media channels – the mass media, print and broadcast advertising, the Internet and consumer education materials – to help Americans select and use OTC medicines wisely. Coinciding with the recent move to a standardized “Drug Facts” label on the majority of nonprescription drugs, the campaign features a new web site – www.bemedwise.org – where consumers, health professionals, educators, and the media can get detailed information about the new OTC label and how to compare products, learn about dosages, and understand information about specific warnings.

Established in 1982, the National Council on Patient Information and Education is a diverse non-profit coalition that works to stimulate and improve the communication of information about the appropriate use of prescription and OTC medicines, such as through *Talk About Prescriptions Month* every October. NCPIE's members include consumer organizations; patient advocacy groups; voluntary health agencies; schools of medicine, pharmacy and nursing; health-related trade associations; prescription and over-the-counter pharmaceutical manufacturers; and local, state and federal government agencies. More information about NCPIE is available through its web site: www.talkaboutrx.org.

#####