

AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Don't use household spoons for liquid medicines

Household spoons may seem handy for giving children liquid medicines, but using them could lead to an overdose.

Spoons are not very accurate, and people sometimes use the wrong type of spoon, said Ian M. Paul, M.D., M.Sc., FAAP, a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Drugs.

In some cases, too much medicine could be serious, Dr. Paul said. For example, repeatedly giving a child too much acetaminophen could lead to liver failure.

More than 70,000 children go to emergency rooms each year for unintentional medicine overdoses, according to Dr. Paul's research. Some of those cases are caused by using the wrong measuring device.

Instead of household spoons, parents should use syringes or the special cup or spoon that comes with the medicine. A pharmacist can provide one if needed. Carefully follow the directions for how much medicine to give, when to give it and for how long.

"They (parents) should make sure they understand their child's dose of a medication and if they don't, they should ask their health care provider for the dose," Dr. Paul said.

Doctors also recommend keeping medicine out of children's reach and using child safety caps. Check labels carefully before giving two medicines together because they may have the same ingredient. Also, bring a list of all medicines your child is taking when you see the doctor.

For medicine mistakes, call the Poison Help number at 800-222-1222. If the child is unconscious, not breathing or having seizures, call 911.

Parents also should be careful when getting rid of unused medicines. In some towns, they can be dropped off at a police department. They also can be mixed with coffee grounds or kitty litter, sealed in a plastic bag and then thrown away where kids can't get to them. Make sure to remove labels with personal details. Medicines should be dumped in the toilet or drain only if the label says it's OK.

— *Melissa Jenco*

RESOURCES

- Tips on giving liquid medication, bit.ly/1ENqQOA
- Tips for disposing of medication, bit.ly/1FUceke

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