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7,000 TRIPS ANNUALLY TO EMERGENCY ROOMS FOR CHILDREN TAKING COUGH AND COLD MEDS

If there is any question about cough and cold medicines being completely safe for children, well consider this. Annually, about 7,000 children ages 11 and younger require a hospital emergency room visit because of an adverse reaction to one of these substances.

This figure comes from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). To arrive at this total, a CDC study reviewed 2004-2005 data provided through the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System. The information came from a cooperative adverse drug event surveillance project done to describe emergency department visits due specifically to cough and cold medications. The results were published online in the American Academy of Pediatrics journal, *Pediatrics*.

The study noted that approximately two-thirds of the incidents requiring emergency room treatment were due to “unsupervised ingestion.” This would fall into the category of children taking the medication without a parent’s knowledge or supervision. Children between the ages of 2 to 5 accounted for 64 percent of the adverse drug events from cough and cold medications. More than 80 percent of these cases involved an “unsupervised ingestion.” Among all age groups, 93 percent of the children did not require a hospital admission, but one-fourth did need additional treatment to eliminate the medicine from their bodies.

“Parents need to be vigilant about keeping these medicines out of their children’s reach,” said Dr. Denise Cardo, director of the Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion for CDC. “They should refrain from encouraging children to take medicine by telling the children that medication is candy.” Dr. Cardo also suggested that adults should avoid taking adult medications in the presence of their young children as this may encourage a child to do the same without the proper supervision.

On January 17, 2008, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an advisory recommending that over the counter cough and cold medications not be used for children. Several months earlier an advisory committee of the FDA had reached the same conclusion. In anticipation of these actions, major manufactures of cough and cold medications had begun voluntarily withdrawing these medications from the market in November.

Currently, the FDA is continuing an investigation into the safety of cough and cold medications for children ages 2 to 11. In the meantime, the FDA warns that parents should definitely not give cold and cough medications to younger children that were intended for older children. One final advisory to parents is that they should dispose of any previously purchased products that were intended for children age 2 and younger.