



**NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S**  
*When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.*

## Helping Hand™

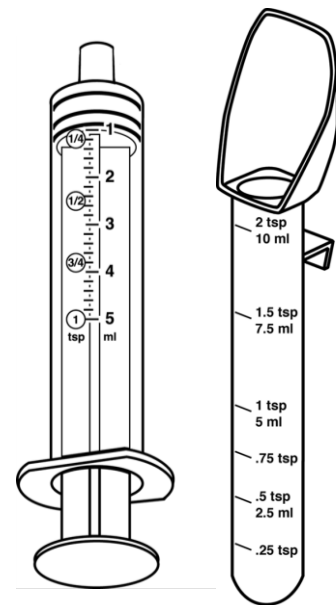
*Health Education for Patients and Families*

# Medicine Safety – General

Many children need medicine to treat their illnesses or conditions. They may take some of these medicines for a short time, or for many years. Here are some tips for the safe use of medicines.

### How to give

- Wash and dry your hands before **and** after using the medicine.
- Use an oral syringe or a pediatric measuring device and know how to use it (Picture 1). You can ask the pharmacist to mark your child's dose on the syringe or measuring device. **DO NOT** use a regular teaspoon or tablespoon. It is not a good way to measure liquid medicine.
- Give only the amount of medicine prescribed and no more.
- Do not share medicine. Never give one person's medicine to someone else. This applies to children and adults.
- Do not use a medicine after the expiration date printed on the container.
- Ask your pharmacist, health care provider, or doctor before crushing any medicine.
- If your child vomits a dose and you are unsure what to do, call the pharmacist, doctor, or health care provider.
- Call your child's doctor, health care provider, or pharmacist with any questions.
- Talk to your child's health care provider or pharmacist before giving more than one medicine at the same time.
- Tell your child's health care provider or doctor about medicines your child takes that were prescribed by a different provider or doctor.



**Picture 1** Use an oral syringe (left) or a pediatric measuring device (right).

## Storage

- Check the label on the medicine for how to store it. Some medicines should be stored at room temperature. Others need to be stored in the refrigerator. Do not keep medicines in the bathroom. It gets too hot and humid. Do not keep medicine(s) in a car because it can get too hot or too cold.
- Do not store creams and ointments next to toothpaste as they can be easily mixed up.
- All medicines should be stored away from direct heat and sunlight. Some should be stored in a completely dark area.
- Use a childproof cap, and relock the cap after each use. Be extra careful with medicines and vitamins that have iron. Iron is a major cause of poisoning deaths in children.
- Keep medicines and vitamins out of the sight and reach of children. This includes over-the-counter (OTC) medicines.
- Tell visitors to store their medicines out of sight and out of reach.

## Other advice

- Fill all prescriptions at the same pharmacy so they can check drug interactions easily.
- Some medicines only come from special pharmacies. Many pharmacies will order medicine for you if they know your child needs it. Check with your pharmacy before you leave the hospital to be sure you can have your prescription filled. You may also have your child's prescriptions filled at the Nationwide Children's Hospital Pharmacy.
- Ask your child's pharmacy to refill medicines 3 to 5 days before you are out.
- Some medicines cannot be refilled. Ask your child's prescriber for a new prescription.
- Always read the information sheet that comes with the medicine.
- If you notice anything different about your child's medicine, tell the pharmacist.
- Tell the health care provider and pharmacist about any reactions to any medicine.
- Always keep a current list of your child's medicines. Other caregivers should also have the list. It should include prescription medicines, OTC medicines, herbal products, and dietary supplements. Try to include possible side effects for each.
- If your child's school is giving the medicine, they will need a note from you and the prescriber. They will also need a second labeled bottle to keep the medicine in.
- When the medicine is no longer needed, dissolve it in water or rubbing alcohol. Mix the dissolved medicine with an unwanted material, like coffee grounds or cat litter. Then, place the mixture back in the pill container or in another container that will not leak. Throw the container away in the trash where children and pets cannot reach it.

## Special note about pregnancy and breastfeeding

- If your child thinks they might be pregnant, tell the health care provider or doctor before starting any medicine. Some medicines may cause problems to the unborn baby.
- If a patient is breastfeeding, tell the health care provider or doctor before taking any medicine. Medicines may pass into breast milk and cause side effects in the baby.
- Some medicines can be dangerous to a pregnant person giving your child medicine. If you or another caregiver are pregnant, ask the doctor or health care provider if this medicine is safe to touch during pregnancy.

## Preventing medicine mistakes

Deaths from medicine mistakes happen each day. These deaths can be caused by taking medicine for the wrong reasons, taking medicine prescribed for someone else, or taking the wrong amount of medicine. Here are tips to prevent mistakes:

- Give medicine only to the person for whom it was prescribed.
- Know what is in your child's medicine and why they take it. Learn the name, spelling, and dose of your child's medicines. Teach your child when they are old enough.
- Always turn on the light when giving or taking medicine.
- Read the label carefully when you take or give medicine. Double-check the dose, time of day, and the person for whom it was prescribed.
- Stay with your child until they have swallowed the medicine.
- Keep medicine in the bottle it came in with the label on it or organized in a pill box or pill reminder container.
- Take all your child's medicines with you in the original bottles when your child sees a health care provider, doctor, or dentist; goes to an emergency department; or is admitted to the hospital.
- If you need to give medicine regularly to your child, have the same person give the medicine each time. Write down the date and times you gave the medicine on a calendar, so you don't give too much.
- Keep the **Poison Center phone number, 1 (800) 222-1222**, where it is easy to see (TTY 1-866-688-0088).

## Questions to ask the doctor, health care provider, or pharmacist

- What is this medicine (Picture 2)?
- What is this medicine being used for?
- How should my child take this medicine?
- How do I store this medicine?
- What are common side effects for this medicine?
- Could this medicine be abused?
- What do I need to do to get more medicine when it runs out?
- What should I do if my child vomits or spits out his medicine?
- What should I do if my child misses a dose of this medicine?



**Picture 2** Ask the pharmacist any questions you may have.

## Steps to help prevent abuse

The home medicine cabinet is an easy place for children to get drugs. Ask the pharmacist if your child's medicine could be abused. Reduce this risk using these steps:

- **Monitor**
  - Count and control your child's medicine.
  - Count your own medicine.
- **Secure**
  - Keep all medicine, including OTC medicine, in a locked cabinet or other safe place that your child cannot get into.
- **Throwing away**
  - Some medicines may need to be taken to a special place to be thrown away. All three Nationwide Children's Outpatient Pharmacies have drop-off receptacles. You can also use DEA's Drug Take Back Day or search the internet for locations of safe drug disposal at [www.rxdrugdropbox.org](http://www.rxdrugdropbox.org).
  - Remove labels on the medicine container before you throw them out to protect your privacy and prevent illegal refills.
- **Talk to your child**
  - Calmly talk to your child about drug use, including prescription medicines.
  - Talk to your family members, especially teens, about the dangers of taking and mixing medicines. Taking too much medicine, or mixing certain medicines together, can be deadly. If you do not know what the risks are, ask a health care provider or pharmacist.