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Poisonings and Medicine Mishaps Can Happen Anywhere, Anytime

March 17-23 is National Poison Prevention Week

TOPEKA – Nearly 60 percent of the human exposures reported to the Kansas Poison Control Center involved medications or pharmaceuticals. While most over-the-counter and prescription medicines can be helpful when taken as directed, when not taken properly, medicines can be harmful, and in some cases deadly. Medication errors can occur at any age, which is why during the March 17-23 National Poison Prevention Week, Safe Kids Kansas asks you to always be aware of proper medicine safety.

“Any medication, prescription or over-the-counter, can be poisonous when used in the wrong way, by the wrong person, or in the wrong amount,” said Cherie Sage, State Director for Safe Kids Kansas. “Be sure to read labels carefully and follow directions. If you have questions, contact your doctor, pharmacist or call the Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222 for information,” said Sage.

“It’s important for everyone to save the Poison Help line in your phone,” said Stefanie Baines, Education Coordinator for the Poison Control Center at the University of Kansas Health System. “Calling 1-800-222-1222 is the fastest way to get an answer from an expert. It is far better than going online to find help, and you can call any time with questions, not just during emergencies,” said Baines.

By taking a few precautions, you can help keep your loved ones and yourself safe from poison emergencies.

Children – As we know, young children are curious and act fast. Therefore, it is vital to use and store medicine around children properly:

- *Always* store medicines up, away, and out of sight of children.
- Read each medicine’s label and always give “as directed” (use the dosing device that comes with the medicine) or as instructed by a physician or pharmacist.

Adolescents – Youth begin to self-medicate around 11 years old (5th and 6th grade), which is why it's important that parents, teachers, and guardians discuss the safe use and storage of medicines with tweens:

- Learn to read, understand and follow the *Drug Facts* label.
- Never share your medicine with someone else or use someone else's medicine.
- Measure every dose carefully, and always use the dosing device that comes with the medicine.
- Be sure to get permission and guidance from a parent or trusted adult before taking medicines.
- Parents and caregivers can find out how to start the conversation about over-the-counter medicine safety here: <http://www.scholastic.com/otcmedsafety/>

Adults – Between taking care of their children and parents, many adults forget about the importance of their own medicine safety. A few simple steps can help prevent poisonings and overdoses:

- Be prepared for any poison emergency by programming the Poison Help line into your phone, 1-800-222-1222, and placing it somewhere visible in your home.
- Properly getting rid of medicine that you don't need is especially important if you have children or pets in your home.
- Keep medicines in their original containers and properly labeled. If you have any questions about a medicine or ingredient, call your local poison center.

Older Adults - About one-third of adults 57 years and older use at least 5 different prescription medicines, and most older adults taking prescription medicines are also using over-the-counter medicines, dietary supplements, or both. Due to the increase in medicines, older adults are twice as likely as others to come to emergency departments for adverse drug events and nearly seven times more likely to be hospitalized after an emergency. As more patients receive care from more than one provider and even more than one pharmacy to meet their pharmaceutical needs, the patient still is the common denominator. Here's how older adults can protect themselves from accidental poisonings and overdoses:

- Discuss *ALL* medications with your doctors and/or pharmacists, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, and vitamins and supplements.
- Read and follow the directions for each of your medicines and take them exactly as directed.
- Keep a list of *ALL* medications that you are taking, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, and vitamins and supplements, and bring the list whenever you go to doctor or drug store.
- Keep your medicines in child-resistant containers and up, away, and out of sight of children.
- If you need glasses, always use them when taking medications. Never take medications in the dark.
- If you experience adverse effects from a medicine or have any questions or concerns about a medicine, call your local poison center at once at 1-800-222-1222.

For more medicine safety tips, visit <http://safekids.org>.

For tips on how to read a drug facts label visit <https://www.knowyourotcs.org/how-to-read/>.

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