

1 in 10 children using cough, cold medications

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Researchers from Boston University's Slone Epidemiology Center have found that approximately one in ten U.S. children uses one or more cough and cold medications during a given week. These findings will be presented today at the 2008 Pediatric Academic Societies' & Asian Society for Pediatric Research Joint Meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Pediatric cough and cold medications are widely marketed in the U.S. but surprisingly little is known about just how often they are used in children. This information is especially important in light of recent revelations that cough and cold medications are responsible for serious adverse events and even deaths among children.

To define the frequency and patterns of use, the researchers analyzed data between 1999 and 2006 from the Slone Survey, a national telephone survey of medication use in a representative sample of the U.S. population. The authors considered all oral medicines that are approved by the FDA to treat children's coughs and colds.

The researchers found that in a given week, at least one cough and cold medication was used by 10.1 percent of U.S. children. In terms of active ingredients contained in these medications, exposure was highest to decongestants and antihistamines (6.3 percent each), followed by anti-cough ingredients (4.1 percent) and expectorants (1.5 percent).

Exposures to cough and cold medications was highest among 2 to 5 year olds, but was also high among children under 2 years of age.

Among all the products used, 64.2 percent contained more than one active ingredient. The most commonly used product types were single-ingredient antihistamines, antihistamine/decongestant combinations and antihistamine/decongestant/anti-cough combinations. The researchers also found the use of cough and cold medications declined from 12.3 percent in 1999-2000 to 8.4 percent in 2005-2006.

According to the researchers the especially common use of cough and cold medications among young children is noteworthy. “Given concerns about potential harmful effects and lack of evidence proving that these medications are effective in young children, the fact that one in ten U.S. children is using one of these medications is striking,” said lead author Louis Vernacchio, MD, MSc, an assistant professor of epidemiology and pediatrics at Boston University School of Medicine.

Source: Boston University

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