

Study examines cold medication use in young children

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Cough and cold medication use in young children has been linked to a significant number of adverse effects and several deaths, leading the FDA to recommend against their use for children less than two years old. Despite these concerns about safety and efficacy, there has been little research on patterns of cough and cold medication use in very young children. Now, a new study from the Emergency Medicine Network led by Katherine O'Donnell, M.D. of Children's Hospital Boston reveals important new statistics about medication use in children under the age of two.

According to the study, 1-in-3 children under the age of two with bronchiolitis (a lower respiratory tract infection associated with runny nose, cough, wheezing and/or difficulty breathing) had received over-the-counter cough and cold medicines in the week prior to visiting an emergency department.

This study identifies rates and predictors of cough and cold medication use prior to the manufacturer recall of and FDA recommendations against use of these medications in children younger than two years of age.

“After the recall and labeling changes, it will be important to monitor for potential ongoing use of these medicines in young children and observe if parents or physicians are turning to other therapies in place of these medications,” says O'Donnell.

Given these findings and the fact that non-concentrated cough and cold formulations remain available for over-the-counter use, the authors encourage physicians to counsel all parents of young children about these ineffective and potentially dangerous medications.

While the study did not identify a specific high-risk demographic group for targeted educational interventions, factors including daycare attendance, second-hand smoke exposure, recent antibiotic use and presence of wheezing were associated with increased use of cough and cold medications. Children less than a year old, as well as those with a history of hospitalization, were less likely to use these medications.

Source: Wiley

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