

Study finds parents use cough medicines on under-2s despite the warnings

May 15 2008

More than 40 per cent of parents have used cough medicine for children younger than two – even though it is not recommended, nor proven effective for children in this age group, an Australia-first study has found.

The joint University of Melbourne and Royal Children's Hospital study, surveyed 325 parents at hospital outpatient clinics, maternal child health centres and child care centres about their use of over-the-counter medication for children aged 0-24 months.

It is the first study in Australia examining the use of over-the-counter medications among parents of children in this age group.

University of Melbourne Nursing PhD researcher Misel (pronounced Michelle) Trajanovska will present data from her study at the National Medicines Symposium 2008 in Canberra tomorrow (Friday 16 May).

She found:

- 98 per cent had purchased an over-the-counter medication in the past year;
- Paracetamol was the most commonly used drug (95.9 per cent);
- 47.3 per cent had given their children topical teething gels;

- Almost half (42.8 per cent) had given their children cough and cold medicines containing anti-histamines;
- Nearly all parents had used over the counter medications to combat pain and fever;
- About seven per cent of parents had given their child over-the-counter medication to induce sleep or settle their child;
- Two parents had given their children paracetamol because they were “cranky”.

Ms Trajanovska said the use of cough and cold medicines on children under two was of particular concern.

“Internationally there have been a number of reports of serious side effects among infants and children given over-the-counter cough medicines,” she said.

“There is also a lack of evidence that these medicines are even effective for treating coughs.

“The Therapeutic Goods Administration recommends that these medicines should not be used on children under two, and from September they will only be available to children under two on prescription.”

Ms Trajanovska said the survey results reinforced the need for continued education of parents about the safe use of over-the-counter medicines.

“Despite the widespread use of over-the-counter medicines for young children, they are not without risks such as side effects or poisoning,” she said.

Ms Trajanovska said that in Victoria 0-4 year olds had the highest poisoning admission rates. In emergency departments 16 per cent of these poisonings were due to paracetamol and 11 per cent were caused by cough and cold medicines.

The next stage of Ms Trajanovska's PhD will investigate where parents get their advice on over-the-counter medications.

Source: University of Melbourne

Citation: Study finds parents use cough medicines on under-2s despite the warnings (2008, May 15) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-05-parents-medicines-under-2s.html>

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