

Advice needed for parents on risk of poisoning in toddlers, research says

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GPs and other primary care professionals need to warn parents about safely storing medicines and other hazardous household products in an effort to cut the number of poisonings among pre-school children, a study has said.

The research, led by academics at The University of Nottingham, recommends advising parents to store medicines out of reach of children, put them away immediately after they have been used and not to take medication in front of their children because of the risk that they will copy them.

Published in the *British Journal of General Practice*, the study also shows that the risk of poisoning is higher in children who live in more deprived households, have older brothers and sisters, have a younger mother or come from a single-parent family.

Dr Elizabeth Orton, in the School of Community Health Sciences at the

University, said: "Poisoning can cause significant harm to [young children](#) and distress to parents, yet it is preventable. It is important that GPs and other healthcare professionals identify children at highest risk of poisoning and target prevention efforts to those families. Parents also need to be aware that it is normal for young children to put objects into their mouth, so it is vital that medicines and other poisonous substances such as [cleaning products](#) or cosmetics are stored out of reach, ideally above counter height and in cupboards with a door catch or lock."

The research paper, Children at Risk of Medicinal and Non-Medicinal Poisoning: A Population-Based Case-Control Study, studied data from children under the age of five, born between January 1988 and November 2004, from The [Health Improvement](#) Network (THIN) database of 3.9 million GP [patient records](#) in the UK.

Toddlers' tenfold risk

It discovered that toddlers aged between two and three years old were nearly ten times more likely than children under one to be poisoned by taking medication, possibly because they are at an age where they naturally begin to imitate the behaviour of adults around them.

Children from that age group were also five times more likely than children under one to need medical attention after swallowing other non-medicinal items, which may be linked to the development of their motor skills, exploratory behaviour and the tendency to put things into their mouth, as well as storage practices—for example cleaning products being stored at lower levels accessible to children.

Mental health factors

The chances of a child swallowing poison in the home were also

increased if their mother misused alcohol or if their mother suffered from perinatal depression—which may be related to either a lack of parental supervision or poor storage of prescribed medicines.

The research showed that routinely available primary care data can be used to target effective safety interventions as recommended by [NICE](#) (National Institute for Clinical Excellence).

The academics say that [primary care](#) professionals should be advising parents on the safe storage of dangerous medicines and household chemicals and to avoid taking medicines in front of children.

Prompt identification of perinatal depression and alcohol misuse and giving out this safety advice, they add, could help to cut the number of [poisonings](#) experienced by young [children](#).

More information: www.rcgp.org.uk/Publications/BJGP.aspx

Provided by University of Nottingham

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