

How to keep kids safe from medications and other household poisons

March 20 2018, by Lesley Young



Improperly stored medications are the leading cause of childhood poisoning in Alberta. The good news is that there are simple things you can do to prevent kids from getting their hands on medications and other potentially poisonous household items. Credit: University of Alberta

Death by poisoning is a very serious problem in Alberta that tends to fall under the radar, according to the University of Alberta's Injury Prevention Centre.

"Poisoning-related deaths accounted for 24 per cent of all injury-related deaths in Alberta between 2011 and 2015. That's a big deal," said Kathy Belton, associate director of the School of Public Health's injury centre.

"And poisoning caused between 1,700 hospitalizations and another 1,400 emergency department visits annually. The numbers won't have changed much by 2018," she added.

Belton said there are easy prevention steps people can take to help protect against the risk of poisoning—which can occur intentionally, unintentionally or experimentally—especially in [children](#).

"National Poison Prevention Week, March 18–24, is the perfect time to pay extra attention to risks to ensure loved ones are safe," said Belton. Here's how:

Keep all prescriptions and over-the-counter medications locked up tight, out of sight and in their original containers.

"Improperly stored medications are the leading cause of childhood poisoning in Alberta," said Belton. "In 2016, 1,723 children under 10 years old visited emergency departments for unintentional [poisoning](#), and medication was involved in seven out of 10 of these visits."

She added that child-resistant medication containers are not childproof, which is why it is necessary to conceal medication in out-of-reach places.

When taking your medications, do it away from children.

"Children often copy the actions of their parents," explained Belton, who added that you should not refer to medicine as candy.

"Always read and follow the instructions carefully when taking your own medication, even if it's a medication you take regularly. And never take someone else's [medication](#)," added Belton.

Guests, family or friends may bring medications into your home. Put purses, backpacks and coats out of children's reach.

"Have a conversation with family, especially grandparents who may be carrying around medicines, about ensuring their purses and coats are stored away from children's reach."

Anything that can be ingested may be a poison.

"Sometimes people don't think about things that could be poisonous to children, such as diaper cream or indoor house plants," said Belton.

"Scan your house and remove any items that might be accidentally ingested by children."

For additional information, resources and toolkits that can be use to help promote poison [prevention](#), visit the [Injury Prevention Centre](#) website.

Provided by University of Alberta

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