

# A pill left out, a child's life lost: Maisie's story a warning to all adults

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Adam and MaryBeth Gillan with Maisie and their other daughter, Rhona. Photo: American Academy of Pediatrics

(HealthDay)—Nine-month-old Maisie Gillan spent just a few moments crawling around on a neighbor's floor, near the end of a dinner party meant to welcome her family to the community.

The next morning her parents woke to discover Maisie cold and lifeless. Paramedics responded quickly but couldn't revive the baby.

Police later figured out Maisie had accidentally ingested methadone that a relative of the neighbor's had carelessly dropped on the floor a few days earlier.

"We had her on the kitchen floor for about five minutes. Everyone was there with her. She was never by herself," said Maisie's father, Adam Gillan. "Our best guess is, as she was crawling around on the floor the pill stuck to her hand, and then her hand went in her mouth."

Now that the coronavirus pandemic has forced many families inside, experts warn that the risk of similar tragedies has only gone up.

Adults need to keep in mind that kids stuck indoors will come across and ingest medication that could make them sick or kill them, said Dr. Sadiqa Kendi, medical director of Safe Kids DC and Children's National Safety Center in Washington, D.C.

"This is actually a high-risk time for children in the home, just because kids are at home for longer periods with potentially other people who aren't usually in the home," Kendi said. "Medication safety is a really important issue at this time."

Even in normal times, more than 50,000 children go to the [emergency room](#) every year because they swallowed something potentially dangerous, and about 9,000 require hospitalization, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

People who don't normally live with kids are now taking care of younger relatives as folks shelter in place, and they need to remember that any sort of medication—prescription, over-the-counter, even vitamins—can do harm, said Maisie's mother, MaryBeth Gillan.

"When people are picking up their prescriptions, they're given a loaded weapon and they're not treating it as such," she said.

The Gillans had just moved back to Rochester, N.Y., and on Jan. 5, 2019, attended a dinner party at a neighbor's house.

They held Maisie in their arms for most of the two hours they spent at the party. But she'd just started to crawl and wanted to be put on the floor, so they set her down for just a bit, Adam Gillan said.

It was around Maisie's bedtime when they took her home, so it wasn't odd that she was sleepy, Adam said.

But the next morning at 6 a.m., MaryBeth went to check on her and found her cold and unresponsive.

For the first 10 days, the Gillans were under the impression that SIDS had claimed their daughter's life, even though her room was perfectly child-safe and all safe sleep guidelines had been followed.

Then toxicology reports came back showing that Maisie had ingested methadone.

It turns out a relative of their neighbor had been prescribed methadone to treat her restless leg syndrome, Adam said.

"In the kitchen, she was transferring the medication from the prescription bottle to a pill box and dropped one along the way," Adam

said. "She filled her pill box and didn't realize she'd missed a pill."

The relative's actions violated just about every rule of [medication safety](#):

- Medications should be kept in their original packaging.
- People should keep count of their pills so they know when they've lost one.
- Folks should take medicine out of a container when they are leaning over a sink or away from common areas in a home.

"None of these things were what this relative did, so all of those layers of protection were removed," Adam said.

Parents should automatically assume children are capable of getting into places they shouldn't be able to reach, said Dr. Elizabeth Murray, an assistant professor of pediatrics and emergency medicine at the University of Rochester.

"Always think a developmental stage ahead of where your kids are. These kids are going to do stuff when we least expect it," Murray said.

It's very important that people leave their medications in their original childproof containers, and store them in places up and away from where kids can reach, Murray said.

That includes putting purses and luggage up and out of reach if you're keeping medication in them, Kendi said.

If you spill pills on the floor, thoroughly vacuum and sweep the entire area to make sure nothing is missed, Murray said. Don't assume you've accounted for them all.

Consider keeping controlled substances like prescription pain medications in a locked box for extra safety, Murray added.

People also should have the Poison Center number stored on their phone and ready to use—(800) 222-1222, Kendi said.

The Gillans have been pressing lawmakers to require that risky medications be provided in one-dose blister packs, so people can only remove one at a time.

"We strongly believe this type of medication, what a number of doctors call a 'one-pill kill,' should be in unit dose packaging or blister packaging," Adam said.

Medications some would consider mundane can take just one dose to cause a child to die, Murray said.

"It turns out many common blood pressure medicines and diabetes medicines can be very dangerous even if the child just ingests one pill," Murray said.

Teething gel is another [medication](#) that could cause harm if a child comes across and ingests it, Murray said.

Murray knew the Gillans, and on the morning Maisie died, she was the on-call physician for the team that reviews all unexpected child deaths.

"It was a perfect storm of awfulness," Murray said. "It goes to show you when you have a bunch of people doing their very best and doing everything right, you can still have these unforeseen events. That's why we need to take additional steps."

**More information:** Safe Kids Worldwide has more about [medication](#)

[safety](#).

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