

Teens dangerously uninformed about OTC medication

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The majority of teens say they have never heard of acetaminophen - or what the appropriate dosing of it is even with access to the label instructions - despite having taken the medication recently, according to a new University of Rochester Medical Center Study assessing teens' health literacy. More than 60 percent of the teens in the study had never before heard of acetaminophen despite 21 percent of them having taken it within the previous month.

When presented with a mock scenario in which they might choose to take acetaminophen (brand name [Tylenol](#)), nearly 85 percent of teens in the study would have put themselves at risk of overdosing on the medication that can cause [liver damage](#). Among those teens with limited health literacy, the percentage of potential overdosing rises to 94 percent.

"Teens are starting to medicate themselves without parental input, so these numbers are incredibly concerning. [Acetaminophen](#) may be an over-the-counter medication, but that doesn't mean it is completely safe. In severe cases, misuse of it can cause [liver failure](#)," said Laura Shone, M.S.W., Dr.P.H., associate professor of Pediatrics at URMC's Golisano Children's Hospital and author of the abstract presented today at the Pediatric Academic Society meeting in Vancouver, Canada.

The study recruited 266 young people in Monroe County, N.Y., between the ages of 16 and 23 in 2008 and 2009. The adolescents' health literacy was assessed through the Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine

(REALM) survey for participants 18 and older and the REALM-Teen for those younger than 18. About 36 percent of teens had limited health literacy and 64 percent had adequate health literacy.

Provided by University of Rochester

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