



American Society of
Health-System Pharmacists®

NEWS RELEASE

“Pharmacists helping people make the best use of medicines”

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 16, 2007

Contact: Ellen Wilcox
Director, ASHP Public Relations
PHONE: 301-664-8621
EMAIL: ewilcox@ashp.org
WEB SITE: www.ashp.org
CONSUMER WEB SITE: www.SafeMedication.com

Accidental Poisonings Can Happen During Day-To-Day Routines *Caregivers play important role in prevention among children and seniors*

Bethesda, MD – With more than 90 percent of poisonings occurring in the home and more than 19 million Americans caring for someone over the age of 75, caregivers and family members of children and seniors play a critical role in prevention of poisonings. The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) recognizes the importance of providing caregivers with poison prevention information during National Poison Prevention Week, March 18-24.

An estimated 44 percent of Americans have an aging parent and a young child for whom they care for. The majority of non-fatal poisonings occur in children younger than six years old and seniors who take multiple medications are at increased risk of accidental poisonings.

“The fact is most accidental poisonings happen among our youngest and oldest populations who are dependant on a caregiver,” said Daniel J. Cobaugh, Pharm.D., FAACT, DABAT, director of research for the ASHP Research and Education Foundation. “Accidental poisonings can take many shapes such as when a child thinks medicine is candy or when a senior becomes confused and takes an additional dose of their medicine.”

To help prevent poisonings from happening, ASHP has developed practical tips for caregivers of children and seniors.

For caregivers of seniors, ASHP recommends following these six tips:

- ***Keep a list of your medicines.*** A written record of medications including medication name, dosage, and frequency, is an important tool to have during physician visits and in case of an emergency. It is also important to record any over-the-counter (OTC) medications, vitamins, supplements, or herbal products are being taken. Having a family member or caregiver keep a copy of this list is also invaluable.
- ***Communicate.*** Stay informed of all medications, including non-prescription medicines and dietary supplements; this will help reduce the chances of an interaction.
- ***Learn about their medicines.*** Ask the doctor or pharmacist to explain each medication, the food and medicines to be avoided, and possible reactions and side effects. Family members or caregivers should also be given this information.
- ***Use one pharmacy.*** Many seniors receive prescriptions from more than one doctor, making drug interactions more likely. By using one pharmacy, all of the prescriptions are consolidated and the pharmacist can check for possible interactions between medicines. It is still important, however, to keep in mind that over-the-counter medicines should also be considered, as overdoses could occur this way.
- ***Keep a journal.*** Make note of all symptoms, especially after taking medicines. Painful or unexpected side effects such as dizziness, nausea, or drowsiness, may signal a need for adjusting the medication regimen.
- ***Maintain a schedule.*** Holding to a routine can decrease the chances of missing dosages or taking more than needed. The use of a pillbox may help with this.

For caregivers of children, ASHP recommends following these five tips:

- ***Use original child-resistant containers.*** Use child-resistant closures on medicines and other products and always keep all medications (both prescription, nonprescription, and dietary supplements) in their original child-resistant containers.
- ***Always call medicine “medicine”.*** Avoid calling medicine “candy” in order to get the child to take the medicine.
- ***Check your medicines periodically for expiration dates.*** If a medication is not dated, consider it expired six months after purchase.
- ***Avoid putting medicines in open trash containers.*** This is especially important in the kitchen or bathroom because many adult medications can be deadly to small children.

- Keep all medicines, including OTC's, herbals, vitamins, and supplements, out of reach of children, or in a locked cabinet.

“The good news is that healthcare professionals and caregivers can work together to create a solution,” said Cobaugh. “By being active participants in their healthcare, family members and caregivers can be informed on the best ways to prevent an accidental poisoning.”

Caregivers and family members should post the poison control center number (800.222.1222) visibly in the home, Cobaugh said. “Many poison control centers are staffed by pharmacists, whose training makes them uniquely qualified to advise caregivers in the event of an emergency.”

Medication tips and information on using medicine safely can be found on ASHP’s consumer Web site, www.SafeMedication.com.

For more than 60 years, ASHP has helped pharmacists who practice in hospitals and health systems improve medication use and enhance patient safety. The Society’s 30,000 members include pharmacists and pharmacy technicians who practice in inpatient, outpatient, home-care, and long-term-care settings, as well as pharmacy students. For more information about the wide array of ASHP activities and the many ways in which pharmacists help people make the best use of medicines, visit ASHP’s Web site, www.ashp.org, or its consumer Web site, www.SafeMedication.com.

###