



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC
Infant Deaths Associated with Cough and Cold Medications – Two States, 2005

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Matthew Reynolds] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds.

Winter is cold season and that probably means you have a supply of cough and cold medicines on hand. But it's important to check with your doctor before reaching for these medicines for your child under two. Cold medicines contain a number of ingredients including decongestants, antihistamines, and cough suppressants. These ingredients can be dangerous and even deadly when they reach very high levels in the blood. In the two years CDC studied, over fifteen hundred children under the age of two were treated in emergency rooms for side effects or overdoses of cough and cold medications.

Here to discuss what you can safely do when your child has a cold is Dr. Adam Cohen of CDC's Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion. Dr. Cohen is part of a team that recently investigated infant deaths due to cold and cough medicine. Welcome to the program, Dr. Cohen.

[Dr. Cohen] Thank you, Matthew.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Cohen, do cough and cold medicines work in children under two years old?

[Dr. Cohen] Although these medicines may be helpful in adults and older children, there really is little evidence that cough and cold medicines work in children under the age of two. And in addition, there are no approved dosing recommendations from the Food and Drug Administration for children under two. We should keep in mind that these drugs can, in rare cases, be harmful or even fatal.

[Matthew Reynolds] What did you and your co-workers find in your study?

[Dr. Cohen] We found that deaths in infants from cough and cold medicines do occur, although they are extremely rare. In our nationwide survey, we identified only three infants who died from the toxic effects of cough and cold medicines in 2005.

[Matthew Reynolds] What precautions should our listeners take if they think their infant requires medicine for a cold?

[Dr. Cohen] Parents should never give children under the age of two any over-the-counter or prescription cold medicines without first talking to their doctor or clinic. And they should be especially careful before giving more than one cough or cold medicine at the same time to their baby or toddler. Parents should talk to their doctor first to find out what medicines and doses are safe for children under two. Cold medicines have different brand names but may contain the same or similar ingredients. And some cough and cold medicines contain more than one active ingredient. Giving more than one cough or cold medicine at the same time could be dangerous for children under two and could possibly result in an overdose.

[Matthew Reynolds] Surely the parents that are listening to this would like to have options for their child. And if giving them medicines isn't an option, what can they do instead of giving those cough and cold medications to their infant?

[Dr. Cohen] There are some simple things that parents can do. We certainly want to help children that are suffering from a cough or cold. Parents can use a cool-mist humidifier in the baby's room to help with the congestion and stuffy nose that comes with a cold. Parents might also try clearing nasal congestion in infants by gently using a rubber suction bulb. A stuffy nose may also be helped by using saline nose drops. And all of these are available without prescription.

[Matthew Reynolds] Let's say the parents have given their children medication. What should they do if they are worried about an overdose?

[Dr. Cohen] If parents are ever worried about a poisoning emergency, they should call the poison control center. And if someone's child has collapsed or is not breathing, they should call 911.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Cohen, thanks for taking the time to talk with us today.

[Dr. Cohen] Thank you, Matthew. It was great to be here.

[Matthew Reynolds] That's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

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