

Central  
New York  
Regional  
Poison  
Control  
Center

# Poison Prevention

## Newsletter November 2001



University Hospital • 750 East Adams Street • Syracuse, NY 13210

### Fall Cleaning Tips - Medicine Cabinet Check-up

- Be sure to look through your medicine cabinet at least once a year.
- Throw away any medication that has passed the expiration date.
- Get rid of any over the counter or Rx medication that you do not use.
- Always store medicine in a cool, dry place up and out of the reach of children.
- To make sure that no one takes the wrong medication, keep all medicines in their original containers.

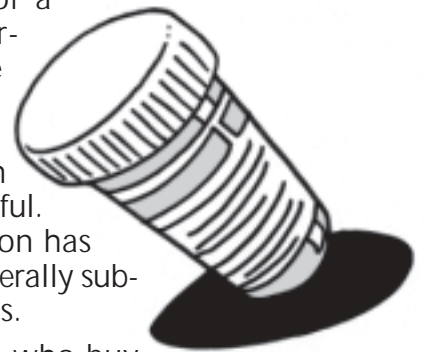


### FDA Offers Website Cautions Tips and Warnings for Consumers

With hundreds of Websites selling medications and supplements how can consumers tell which sites are legitimate ones, especially when it is very easy to set up a site that is very professional looking and promises deep discounts or a minimum of hassles?

If you buy medical products online, be aware of the following dangers:

- Purchasing a medication from an illegal Website puts you at risk. You may receive a contaminated product, the wrong product, an incorrect dose, or no product at all.
- Taking an unsafe or inappropriate medication puts you at risk for dangerous drug interactions and other serious health consequences.
- Getting a prescription drug by filling out a questionnaire without seeing a doctor poses serious health risks. A questionnaire does not provide enough information for a health-care professional to determine if that drug is for you or safe to use, if another treatment would be better for you, or if you have an underlying medical condition where using that drug may be harmful. The American Medical Association has determined that this practice is generally sub-standard medical care. FDA agrees.



FDA offers these tips to consumers who buy health products online:

- Check with the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy ([www.nabp.net](http://www.nabp.net)) to determine whether a Website is a licensed pharmacy in good standing.

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**We're always available for both poison emergencies  
and poison information**



365 days a year  
24 hours a day  
or visit on the web at  
[www.cnypoison.org](http://www.cnypoison.org)

# Herbal Meds for Kids

Supplement manufacturers have recently tapped into a major new market with products. "E-Kid-Nacea Plus claims to be "an echinacea supplement that promises to "support a healthy immune system"; "Calm Child," a combination of hawthorn berry, catnip leaf, and other herbs that "support a focused calmness". Herbs for Kids brand "St. John's Wort Blend," is a product that "nourishes the nervous system and promotes a positive outlook."

Nearly every childhood affliction now has a corresponding herbal remedy. Americans are expected to spend nearly \$16 billion on herbals this year.

The question is...do herbs deliver? Unfortunately, many parents end up paying for empty promises instead of reliable remedies. Herbal medicines are

unregulated and unproven, and may not live up to their claims. In fact, some may even be harmful or at the least, not as potent as manufacturers claim.

Herbal products are only minimally regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, and a given dose may contain anywhere from a megadose of an active ingredient to no active ingredient at all. Herbs can also be contaminated with toxic heavy metals such as lead or mercury, or, in the case of many herbs imported from China, intentionally laced with steroids and other dangerous medications.

Furthermore, only a few herbs, including echinacea and St. John's wort, have ever been tested for safety and effectiveness. And in most studies, the subjects were either lab rats or adults, not children. Additionally, children maybe especially vulnerable to side effects.

In 1998, the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) received four reports of children under developing life-threatening complications after taking dietary supplements (not including vitamins and minerals). Another 192 youngsters had less serious reactions. While these cases represent a tiny fraction of all the children who take herbs, there were probably many more incidents that were never reported to a poison control center. Herbs can also indirectly harm children if parents use them in place of prescription medications.

Parents should treat herbals as they would any medication by keeping all herbal products out of children's reach and never giving more than the recommended dose. Most important, parents should inform their child's pediatrician about every herb their child takes, to prevent the possibility of interaction.

## FDA Offers Website Cautions Tips and Warnings for Consumers

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- Don't buy from sites that offer to prescribe a prescription drug for the first time without a physical exam, sell a prescription drug without a prescription, or sell drugs not approved by FDA.
- Don't do business with sites that have no access to a registered pharmacist to answer questions.
- Avoid sites that do not identify with whom you are dealing and do not provide a U.S. address and phone number to contact if there's a problem.
- Don't purchase from foreign Websites at this time because generally it will be illegal to import the drugs bought from these sites, the risks are greater, and there is very little the U.S. government can do if you get ripped off.
- Beware of sites that advertise a "new cure" for a serious disorder or a quick cure-all for a wide range of ailments.
- Steer clear of sites that include undocumented case histories claiming "amazing" results.
- Talk to your health-care professional before using any medications for the first time.

## WWW.

- Does your organization have a website?
- Does your organization work with children, parents, school nurses, teachers, senior citizens, health issues,  
...OR...
- Are you a healthcare professional working in the treatment of the poisoned patient?

If yes, may we suggest you **LINK our site to yours!**  
Let's work together to promote wellness!

**Visit us on the web at [www.cnypoison.org](http://www.cnypoison.org)**

# For Pets ONLY

The annual sales of all pet products have jumped dramatically in the last few years. This may be good news for the seller, but experts are becoming concerned. It seems many consumers, while looking for cheaper or stronger drugs, are buying pet medications for their own use. Unfortunately, drugs intended for animals can lead to serious consequences if ingested by humans. For the most part, veterinary medications are not tested for safety in humans.

Many drugs sold for animal use are found in concentrations that may be less pure than those marketed for people. The improper use of a drug as familiar as penicillin could cause side effects and contribute to the spread of antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria. But antibiotics aren't the only drugs intended for animals that are being used by humans.

The biggest sellers in pet and feed stores are dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) and methylsulfonylmethane (MSM). Both are promoted on the Internet as remedies for arthritis and other ailments, even though MSM is untested in human beings and there is some evidence that DMSO may cause vision problems.

While some people use animal medications be-

cause they are cheaper and easier to get than prescription drugs, others are seeking altered states of mind. Two popular, but illegal, hallucinogens, phencyclidine (known on the streets as PCP, or angel dust) and ketamine (known as Special K), got their starts as animal tranquilizers.

Another hazard comes from accidental usage; veterinary drugs are rarely packaged in childproof containers. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Center for Veterinary Medicine, no governmental body tracks crossover use of animal preparations. However, the American Association of Poison Control Centers reports that in 1998, 3,702 people were poisoned by veterinary drugs.



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## School Poison Safety

The majority of poisonings in the U. S. involve medication. Medication in backpacks and lunchboxes, mixed in with other personal belongings, can be dangerous not only to your child but to your child's schoolmates.

The truth is, you might not always have control over the medication included in a backpack. Show your child how important this matter is to you, by following these steps:

- Find out exactly what the school's policy is on bringing and administering medication and follow it.
- Discuss the school policy with your child as well as the specific medication directions and precautions. If your child is old enough, make sure to explain the dangers of the misuse, abuse and the accidental nature of poisonings.
- Keep medication in its original container or ask the pharmacist for another pill vial to store only the amount necessary for school. List all the information as on the original vial, which can then be kept at home.
- Take the time to talk directly to your child's teacher/ nurse about the medication, to be on

the look-out for any symptoms or unusual behavior. (e. g. Cold and cough preparations often contain alcohol and can cause excitability or the opposite, drowsiness in a child.)

- Present the teacher/ nurse written information with the name of your child, the name of the medication and detailed instructions. Take every precaution to prevent an accident from happening.
- Include the number of the Poison Control Center. Naturally, Poison Center Specialists cannot determine your child's dosage, as prescribed by the doctor, but we can act as a resource, if necessary. (The Poison Center will gladly send you a telephone sticker, just call.)

Accidents are not supposed to happen, but they do. Keep your child as safe as possible by taking the steps to reduce the risk of poisonings.

Dialing 1.800.222.1222 will connect you to the Poison Control Center in your area. To contact the Central New York Poison Control Center business office, dial 1.315.464.7078.

Visit our website at [www.cnypoison.org](http://www.cnypoison.org)

## ACTIVATED CHARCOAL

Activated charcoal is a specially processed form of charcoal. The charcoal particles act like a sponge to “adsorb” a poison or drug on contact. The charcoal then passes through the body and is eliminated in the feces.



### IMPORTANT!

**ONLY USE** activated charcoal **IF** you are directed to do so by a Poison Control Center.

## POISON PREVENTION:

For copies of this newsletter, or for more information about poison prevention materials and programs, please contact CNYPCC Health Educator, at 315-464-5375.

## Service Area of the CNY Poison Control Center



A Service of the State University of New York  
Upstate Medical University at  
University Hospital, Syracuse.  
A Member of the American Association of  
Poison Control Centers

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