



Upstate  
New York  
Poison  
Center

1-800-222-1222

[www.upstatepoison.org](http://www.upstatepoison.org)

# Poison Prevention

## Newsletter

## December 2013

UPSTATE • 750 East Adams Street • Syracuse, NY 13210  
MEDICAL UNIVERSITY

### DID YOU KNOW?

Contributed by Chelle, CSPI

**Poinsettia plants are considered non-toxic to humans.**

*For info about pets, see page 3*



### Over the Counter (OTC) Literacy Program Teaching Grades 5 and 6

A recent study indicates that children begin taking medicine on their own around age 11. It is important for children to know the rules of medication safety *before* they embark on this journey of self-medicating.

In collaboration with Scholastic and McNeill Consumer Healthcare, the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) is promoting the *OTC Literacy Program*, available online at <http://www.scholastic.com/OTCliteracy>. The program provides teachers, school nurses and parents accurate and up to date information for teaching children the rules of medication safety.

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## Community Efforts to Reduce Drug Use

It may surprise you to know that in Onondaga County about 26 of every 1000 newborns are discharged from the hospital with a drug-related diagnosis. According to the New York Department of Health<sup>1</sup>, this “newborn drug-related discharge rate” is significantly higher than that of New York City (6.6 per 1,000), higher than the state average (6.9 per 1,000 births) and higher than the national average (3.3 per 1,000 births)<sup>2</sup>.

Some babies who are born chemically dependent suffer from Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS), going through drug withdrawal after birth. This syndrome occurs most commonly with opioid use, including prescription pain relievers and illegal drugs such as heroin. Symptoms depend on a combination of factors such as the type of drug used, length of time the fetus is exposed, and the amount of drug the mother used.

Overall, NAS has been on the rise throughout the US according to a recent study.<sup>2</sup>

- In 2000, 4,682 newborns were reported to have neonatal abstinence syndrome in the US. By 2009, the number had nearly tripled to 13,539.
- As of 2009, one baby is born every hour with signs of drug withdrawal.
- In 2009, the estimated mean hospital charge for drug-dependent newborns exceeded \$53,000, with 78% of charges attributed to the state’s Medicaid program.

Based on these data, Onondaga County’s Health Commissioner, in conjunction with the Commissioner of Mental Health, called for community solutions to address this identified public health issue. They assembled representatives from key community agencies, organizations, business and healthcare to develop an action plan. As a result, the Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) Elimination Team was organized. Simultaneously, the Onondaga County District Attorney’s Office Prescription Drug Task Force, including many members of the NAS Elimination team and other community leaders, began to focus on the issue from the perspective of law enforcement. Additionally, Crouse Hospital’s Perinatal Substance Abuse Committee addresses ongoing issues related to NAS. These committees are currently working collaboratively to find solutions to our community’s problem.

Four early strategies were developed in response to the problem including:

- Identifying resources and securing funding
- Providing training for healthcare staff to better identify moms on drugs in order to deliver early intervention and treatment
- Developing a public health campaign to create awareness and to act as a call for behavior change
- Eliminating access and availability of these drugs

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# Drug Take-Back Press Conference

The Upstate New York Poison Center was front and center at a press conference recently held at Kinney Drugs in Liverpool. Senator Charles Schumer urged the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to amend and approve regulations to allow pharmacies to take-back prescription medications on an on-going basis. Although a recently passed New York State bill would certify pharmacies to hold take backs, it cannot happen until the DEA amends current regulations. Take-back drug days directed by the DEA are currently held only twice annually, in the spring and in fall. .

Prescription drug abuse is a problem nationwide, increasing steadily for the past 2 decades, according to the Centers for Disease Control. The Upstate New York Poison Center estimates that across their 54-county region, drug abuse is up over 150%. In 2011, there were 3,103 reported cases of prescription drug abuse; 205 in Cayuga County, 105 in Cortland, 27 in Lewis, 113 in Madison, 701 in Oneida, 1,620 in Onondaga, and 332 in Oswego.

Senator Schumer's efforts would help reduce access and availability of these medications.

Seventy percent of teens that abuse prescription drugs say they get them from family or friends and often from the family medicine cabinet. Surveys conducted by the Upstate New York Poison Center at local take-back days showed that without these events, respondents would most likely continue to store the medicine in their homes, leaving them within easy access.

Making the take-back process easier for the general public and increasing the opportunities for drug disposal will reduce the number of available prescription medications stored in our medicine cabinets within easy access.

In addition to Senator Schumer, local leaders attending the event included Onondaga County District Attorney, Bill Fitzpatrick, Onondaga Health Commissioner, Dr. Cynthia Morrow, Kinney Drugs representatives, and representatives from the Upstate New York Poison Center and the Prevention Network, CNY.



## Over the Counter (OTC) Literacy Program

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The OTC Literacy program, modeled after the Federal Drug Administration's (FDA) Medicines in My Home is targeted at fifth and sixth graders and is in alignment with Core Education Standards. The program includes pre and post assessments in addition to valuable lessons for the students such as: Understanding the Drug Facts Label, Measuring and Storing Medication as well as information about Medicine Abuse. The phone number for Poison Control is listed prominently in the materials.

Readers are encouraged to call the Poison Center with either questions about medications or in a poison emergency. Open 24/7 Poison Centers are always available to help.

Additionally, the program offers another component for success at <http://www.scholastic.com/OTCliteracy/parents>, providing parents tools to help them reinforce school-based learning or for use as a learning opportunity within the home setting, opening the lines of communication between child and parent on this important topic. One unique item, identified as the "Digital Flipbook" relates stories about medication, allowing both parent and child the opportunity to read, discuss and most importantly to come together for a conclusion that promotes the safe use of medication.

Be sure to visit the websites above to find these exciting tools to help you promote safe medication rules with your child before they begin self-medicating.

**KNOW THE FACTS:**  
**OVER THE COUNTER (OTC) MEDICINE LITERACY AND SAFETY FOR ADOLESCENTS**

The majority of adolescents begin to self-medicate with OTC medications between 10-12 years old

**BY AGE 16, APPROXIMATELY 90% OF ADOLESCENTS REPORT SELF-ADMINISTERING OTC MEDICATIONS**

**UNSUPERVISED SELF-ADMINISTRATION CAN LEAD TO INCORRECT USE IN INDIVIDUALS UNDER THE AGE OF 18**

**58,546 ER VISITS WERE CAUSED BY ADOLESCENTS SELF-ADMINISTERING MEDICATIONS**

**34% OF ALL ER VISITS CAUSED BY MEDICATION OVERDOSE WERE FROM OTC DRUGS**

**THESE INCIDENTS ARE PREVENTABLE**  
MAKE SURE YOUR CHILDREN KNOW THAT USING OTC AND PRESCRIPTION MEDICINES INCORRECTLY CAN CAUSE HARM



# Holiday Food Safety

When planning your holiday dinner, take the necessary steps to protect your friends and family from *food-borne illnesses*.

While the U.S. food supply is one of the safest in the world, some 76 million people get sick from food-borne illness every year, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Food safety can be a special challenge during the holidays as menus often include more dishes than your refrigerator or oven can hold!

To make sure your holiday dinner is not only delicious but safe as well follow these tips:

**Have a master plan.** Chefs do it, and so should you. Consider your refrigerator, freezer and oven space and plan how you will manage to keep the hot foods hot (at 140 degrees or higher) and cold foods cold (at 40 degrees or below).

**Cook to proper temperature – always use a thermometer.** There is simply no other way to determine if meat and poultry has been cooked well enough to kill bacteria. So, keep a thermometer readily available and test meat and poultry before serving. Recommended temperatures are most often listed on the thermometer.

**Refrigerate or heat leftovers within two hours of preparation.** Leaving food out too long is one of the most common mistakes of holiday food safety. The rule of thumb is to rotate every two hours, keeping the cold foods cold and the hot food hot. When hosting a family meal, remember not to let food sit out too long. Also, make sure the refrigerator is not over-packed so air can properly circulate around the food.

**Wash your hands thoroughly and often – before, during, and after food preparation.** Simply washing hands is one of the easiest ways to minimize bacterial contamination and keep your food safe. Remember to



wash any platter after using it for raw poultry to prevent contaminating the poultry once it is cooked.

**Wash all fresh produce.** Wash all produce, even prepackaged greens, to minimize potential bacterial contamination. Make sure kitchen counters, sponges, cutting boards, and knives are all well scrubbed.

**Provide single serving sizes and serving spoons.** Holidays occur during cold and flu season. To avoid sharing germs, discourage guests from using their “used” spoon, to select food from the serving dish. Always have a serving spoon handy. When serving appetizers discourage your guests from “double-dipping”. Be sure to supply a small spoon with a dip or sauce, so your guests can place a dollop on their individual plates, to reduce germs.

If you suspect food poisoning, medical experts at the Upstate New York Poison Center are available 24/7, even on holidays.

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## Are Poinsettias Poisonous to Cats & Dogs?

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Far more worrisome than the poinsettia plant are holiday bouquets containing lilies, holly or mistletoe. Even bouquets brought into the house by holiday guests should be thoroughly inspected, as lilies are the #1 flower often used by florists. Just one or two bites from a lily can result in severe acute kidney failure in cats – even the pollen is thought to be poisonous! Other yuletide plants such as holly berries, mistletoe, and rosemary can also be toxic to dogs and cats. When Christmas or English holly is ingested, it can result in severe gastrointestinal upset thanks to the spiny leaves and the potentially toxic substances (including saponins, methylxanthines, and cyanogens). If ingested, most dogs and cats lip smack, drool, and head shake excessively due to the mechanical injury from the spiny leaves. As for mistletoe, most of us hang it high enough so it’s out of reach of our dogs and cats – nevertheless, it can

also be toxic if ingested. Thankfully, American mistletoe is less toxic than the European varieties of it. Mild signs of gastrointestinal irritation are seen, although if ingested in large amounts, collapse, hypotension, ataxia (walking drunk), seizures and death have also been reported.

Source: [www.petpoisonhelpline.com/2011/02/are-poinsettias-poisonous-to-cats-dogs/](http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/2011/02/are-poinsettias-poisonous-to-cats-dogs/)

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## Teamwork in action:

- The Perinatal Substance Abuse Committee Program developed a guideline: Clinical Guidelines for Universal Drug Screening for Mothers and Newborns
- Prevention Network provided SBIRT training (screening, brief intervention, referral to treatment) for 30 community agency personnel and sponsored 8 NAS billboards, posted in target areas as identified in the data.
- The Onondaga County Health Department and the Upstate New York Poison Center developed concepts for brochures, posters and billboard and conducted testing with focus groups.
- Focus group testing was conducted through Crouse Chemical Dependency Program to test print collaterals with the target audience of the public health campaign.
- Incentives were provided by REACH CNY for the 22 women.
- Onondaga County's legislature approved funding in the 2014 budget to allow for continued support for NAS initiatives and a part-time SBIRT County Coordinator.
- Grant funding was secured through SAMHSA's Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Center for Excellence Award. This award will provide funding for a .5 FTE position to coordinate efforts, working with local agencies to implement SBIRT strategies delivering early

intervention and treatment services to persons with substance use disorders and those at risk for developing these disorders.

- In collaboration with the Onondaga County's District Attorney's Office, Senator Charles Schumer called a press conference at Kinney Drugs in Liverpool in late October to urge the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to take action, allowing pharmacies to take-back prescription medications on an on-going basis. (Although a recently-passed New York State bill would certify pharmacies to hold take backs, it cannot happen until the DEA amends current regulations.)

Presently plans are underway to identify channels for distribution of print materials and to develop additional opportunities for collaboration. Progress continues as teamwork in Onondaga County delivers solutions to identified public health problems facing the communities we serve. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact Gail Banach at the Upstate New York Poison Center at [banachg@upstate.edu](mailto:banachg@upstate.edu) or at 315-464-5423.

1. The Statewide Planning and Research Cooperative System (SPARCS) Data. *Newborn drug-related hospitalization rate per 10,000 newborn discharges*. Source:2009-2011 as of February, 2013. <http://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/chac/hospital/h46.htm> - 28k. (accessed November 12, 2013).

2. Patrick SW, Schumacher RE, Benneyworth BD, Krans EE, McAllister JM, Davis MM. Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome and Associated Health Care Expenditures, United States, 2000-2009. *The Journal of the American Medical Association, JAMA*. 2012 May 9;307(18):1934-40. doi:10.1001/jama.2012.3951. Epub 2012 Apr 30

## FRIGHTENING STATS

A survey of teenagers by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America found that:

- 1 in 5 teens has tried Vicodin, a powerful and addictive narcotic pain reliever
- 1 in 10 has tried OxyContin, another prescription narcotic
- 1 in 10 has used the stimulants Ritalin or Adderall for nonmedical purposes
- 1 in 11 teens has admitted to getting high on cough medicine



Upstate Medical University

750 East Adams Street • Syracuse, NY 13210

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