

For Immediate Release
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Even Supreme Court Justices have trouble in the Cold and Flu Season

Last week, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Ginsburg combined prescription and over-the-counter medications landing the 76-year-old in the hospital. Although the Justice Ginsburg is quoted as saying she was “dumb,” drug mishaps like this are a common occurrence, especially among seniors. Poison Centers across the nation are specially trained to help in similar circumstances, especially during cold and flu season.

The medical staff at the Washington Poison Center (WAPC) is ready to answer your calls about cold and flu medications. During last year’s fall and winter, the WAPC took 2,303 calls about cold and flu medications. There were 1,288 accidental overdoses of these medications, and 844 of those calls were for children under the age of five. Another 238 callers wanted to know if an over-the-counter (OTC) drug would interact with their prescriptions. The WAPC is expecting the number of these types of calls to increase this year due to the H1N1 virus (also known as Swine Flu) already making its way into schools and workplaces.

The WAPC has compiled a list of tips based on commonly asked questions their 24-hour call center receives:

- Children younger than four should not get over-the-counter cold or cough medicine. To ease cold symptoms, give extra fluids, use a nasal aspirator, and consider using a humidifier.
- Choose medicines only for the symptoms. You can give one multi-symptom OTC medicine – as long as it fits the symptoms.
- Pay attention to label abbreviations like Tbsp (tablespoon) and Tsp (teaspoon), oz. (ounces), ml. (milliliter), and mg. (milligram) AND use the packaged measuring device.
- Dose OTC medication according to the directions based on age and weight. Read the "Warnings" sections for possible drug interactions and side effects. Call the Poison Center with questions.
- Don't give two over-the-counter medicines with the same active ingredients. For example, many cold medicines contain acetaminophen – which is the same as Tylenol.
- If medicine is vomited or spit up, don't give another dose. Instead, call 1-800-222-1222 for instructions. Ask if you can mix the medication with a favorite food or drink.
- Never give a child OTC medicines that are meant for adults. Use only products that are labeled for use in babies, infants, or children ("for pediatric use").
- Be certain of the dose and medication. If you have any doubts, call the Poison Center for advice from one of its specially-trained pharmacists, nurses or poison specialists.

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