



Australian Prescriber



AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW

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Over-the-counter medications not always safe for children

Many people assume that if you can buy a medicine without a prescription it is safe, and safe to give to children. This is not always the case, according to an article in the latest edition of *Australian Prescriber*.

Dr Noel Cranswick and Dr George McGillivray of the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne write that we often treat children as young adults, but many preparations bought over the counter are not suitable for children.

For example:

- Oral decongestants may be helpful for the relief of symptoms associated with viral illnesses. However, many preparations have age restrictions and are not recommended for children under two.
- Antihistamines are often used in childhood illnesses because of their sedative effects. However they can cause paradoxical reactions of hyperactivity in toddlers, and promethazine has been associated with sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Paracetamol is often overused in the treatment of childhood fever, and this can cause liver failure. Parents should use paracetamol with caution, and not exceed the recommended dose.
- Aspirin is not recommended for children under 12, because of a rare adverse effect called Reye's syndrome.

'Despite being freely available from a pharmacy or supermarket, many preparations are of unproven benefit,' the authors said.

'Some have the potential for harm, especially in the young. Health professionals, as well as parents, have a responsibility to be cautious about giving drugs to children.'

For a copy of the complete article or information about *Australian Prescriber*, visit the homepage at <http://www.australianprescriber.com> or phone 02 6289 7038.

Further information: Dr Noel Cranswick

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This national independent review of therapeutic topics is designed to assist health professionals in their duties. The journal provides independent comment - no advertising is accepted.

This issue also looks at chronic bronchitis, and new techniques of viewing the brain.