

# Misuse or unsafe storage of opioids and other prescription drugs can kill children

## ▶ **OVER 1,500 U.S. CHILDREN WERE ADMITTED TO E.R. FOR OPIOID OVERDOSE IN 2018.** 20% of these admissions were for methadone overdoses.

Children between the ages of 1 and 5 years were the second most-likely to be admitted for opioid overdose, accounting for over one-third of cases. Children across the country and in New Jersey have died or been seriously injured from accidental or deliberate exposure to medications that support recovery from opioid use disorders, such as methadone and buprenorphine, when:

- Unsupervised children ingest their parent's prescription opioid medications that were not safely stored;
- Parents deliberately administer their own prescription opioid medication to infants in an attempt to quiet their colic/crying or to suppress symptoms of neonatal abstinence syndrome;
- Parents use a beverage container for liquid methadone, do not wash it following use of the medication, and a child uses the unwashed cup; and
- Children rest on the body of someone wearing a fentanyl patch.

## ▶ **TAKE THESE STEPS TO PREVENT CHILD INJURY OR DEATH**

- Tell every recipient of prescription opioid medications: "This medication can kill a child."
- Ask every recipient of opioid prescriptions whether there are children living in, or frequently visiting, their home.
- Ask your patient exactly where they store prescription drugs in the home. Strongly reinforce that medications need to be re-stored in a safe location after every use.
- Direct adult patients to never administer their own medication to anyone else, especially a child.
- Direct adult recipients of liquid methadone to follow all requirements for safe storage of take-home bottles, including use of a lockbox that is kept out of the reach of children.
- Distribute the attached safety tips to all adult patients receiving prescription methadone or buprenorphine.

## ▶ **INCORRECT OR ADULT DOSAGES OF ANY MEDICATION CAN BE TOXIC OR FATAL TO CHILDREN.** Nationally:

- Approximately 60,000 emergency department (ED) visits result from unintentional medication overdoses among children under the age of 5;
- One out of every 150 two-year-olds is treated in an ED for an unintentional medication overdose; and
- Over 90% of ED visits for unintentional medication overdoses among children under the age of 5 involve children who get into medicine on their own without caregiver oversight.

▶ Talk to your patients about these dangers when providing a prescription for ANY medication.

▶ Tell patients to program the Poison Help line into their phones: (800) 222-1222.

