



NACoA's Parent's Guide: Safe Medication Storage

Ensuring the safe storage of medications in your home is crucial to protect children and other family members from accidental ingestion and potential harm. A recent large-scale 27-year study published in *JAMA Network Open* ***Intoxication in Children From Opioids Prescribed to Family Members*** examined over 3.7 million children and found that when a family member filled an opioid prescription, children in the household faced a markedly increased risk of serious opioid-related harm.

The findings are striking: children living in these homes had nearly **three times the risk of serious opioid events**—including emergency visits and hospitalizations—and nearly **four times the risk of opioid-related death** compared to children in households without opioid prescriptions.

By following these guidelines, you can create a safer environment for your family.

1. Store Medications Securely

- **Use Locked Storage** Keep all medications, including prescription and over-the-counter drugs, in a locked cabinet, closet, or safe that is out of reach and sight of children. This prevents unauthorized access and reduces the risk of accidental poisoning.
- **Maintain Original Packaging** Store medications in their original containers with clear labels and child-resistant caps. This ensures proper identification and provides essential usage and dosage information.

2. Educate Family Members

- **Communicate Risks** Inform all household members, including children, about the dangers of consuming medications not prescribed to them. Encourage open discussions about medicine safety.
- **Supervise Medication Intake** Always supervise children when they are taking medications to ensure correct dosage, correct administration, and at the right time of day.

3. Monitor Medication Quantities

- **Regular Inventory Checks** Keep track of the amounts of each medication in your home. Regular monitoring can help detect any discrepancies or potential misuse.
- **Dispose of Unneeded Medications** Safely dispose of expired or unneeded medications through drug take-back programs or follow FDA guidelines for household disposal. All medications have expiration dates, and these should be complied with whenever possible for the safety of anyone consuming the medication.

4. Be Vigilant in Various Environments

- **Assess Other Homes** When visiting family, friends, or community members, be aware of the potential presence of accessible medications. Politely inquire about the storage of medications to ensure they are out of reach of children or keep your children within your view during the visit.
- **Secure Personal Belongings** If carrying medications in purses, bags, or coat pockets, ensure these items are stored securely and are inaccessible to children.

5. Draw Parallels to Other Household Dangers

Just as you would safeguard children from hazards like knives or firearms, it's essential to protect them from medications that could cause harm. Implementing strict storage practices for medications is a critical component of maintaining a safe home environment.

6. Storing Narcan Safely and Responsibly

If someone in your household is at risk of an opioid overdose, keeping Narcan (naloxone) on hand can be lifesaving. Narcan is a medication that can rapidly reverse an opioid overdose, but like all medicines, it should be stored safely to prevent accidental misuse.

- **Keep it Accessible but Secure** Store Narcan in a safe, easy-to-reach location where adults can access it quickly during an emergency. For example, a high cabinet or a locked drawer can work well.
- **Keep It Out of Children's Reach** Ensure that the storage spot is not accessible to children or anyone who might misuse it.
- **Inform Trusted Adults** Let other responsible household members know where Narcan is stored and how to use it. Provide them with basic instructions or resources to be prepared (or take a free community course about Narcan administration).
- **Check Expiration Dates** Regularly check the expiration date on Narcan and replace it when necessary to ensure it's effective if needed.
- **Having Narcan on hand is an important part of protecting your family**, just like having a fire extinguisher or first aid kit. By storing it responsibly, you can ensure it's ready to save a life while keeping your home safe for everyone. By adhering to these practices, you can significantly reduce the risk of accidental medication exposure and ensure a safer environment for your family.

Additional Resources

- **EPA Guidelines on Safe Storage** For more detailed information on safe medication storage, refer to the EPA's guidelines.
- **FDA Disposal Recommendations** Learn about proper disposal methods for unused medications to prevent environmental contamination and misuse.
- **Order medication disposal packets** off Amazon and follow enclosed directions for disposal of expired or unused medications in your home.
- **Ask your local police department** how this is done in your community.
- **Keep Poison Control Information Handy** Accidental poisoning can happen quickly, even in the safest homes. To be prepared, save the Poison Control Center's number—**1-800-222-1222**—in your phone and post it in a visible spot in your home, such as on the refrigerator or near a landline phone. This number is available 24/7 and connects you to experts who can provide immediate guidance in case of accidental medication ingestion or other poisoning emergencies. Being prepared with quick access to this resource can make all the difference in ensuring safety and effective response in critical moments.

By adhering to these practices, you can significantly reduce the risk of accidental medication exposure and ensure a safer environment for your children and family members.

Additional Important Resources When Talking With Kids and Teens Affected by Alcohol/Substance Misuse or Parental Substance Use Disorders

- **Tools for Kids** https://nacoa.org/tools_for_kids/
- **Tools for Parents and Caregivers: Helping Families Impacted by Substance Use Disorders** <https://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Tools-for-Parents-and-Caregivers.NACoA2024.pdf>
- **Language When Talking With Kids and Teens** https://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Stigma.LanguageWithKidsandTeens.2025.NACoA_.pdf
- **NACoA's Parents Guide: Talking With Kids** <https://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/NACoAs-Parents-Guide.Talking-With-Kids.2026.pdf>



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