Poisoning Prevention Packaging Act: 50 Years of Saving Lives

Child-proof medicine bottles; child-proof cabinet locks; child-proof gates...there is a long list of child-proof items you can buy that promise to protect your child from harm. We use that term ‘child proof’ a lot. But when it comes to medicine bottles, there is actually no such thing. Many parents of toddlers have learned the hard way that, given enough time, some children can figure out how to open bottles with safety caps—especially if they watch an adult open them first.

The correct term for those safety caps is ‘child resistant.’ This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Poisoning Prevention Packaging Act (PPPA), which made it the law to sell medicines and other hazardous household products in child resistant packages to help keep children safe. Passing the PPPA was a milestone in childhood poisoning prevention. In fact, since the PPPA took effect, the numbers of children dying from poisoning each year has dropped by 92 percent (see graph on page 3).

The very first child resistant safety cap was designed by Peter Hedgewick, a Canadian tool manufacturer. He called it the “Palm N Turn” cap, and it worked because it required two actions at the same time: pushing down on the cap

Alcohol and COVID-19: What You Need to Know

Americans are buying and consuming more alcohol than before the pandemic, according to a study conducted by the RAND Corporation and published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. Overall drinking has increased among adults by 14%. In particular, women have greatly increased their episodes of heavy drinking (defined as 4 or more drinks within a couple of hours).
Many adults can safely enjoy moderate amounts of alcohol as long as they drink responsibly. But drinking too much – on a single occasion or over time – can take a serious toll on your health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, heavy drinking brings additional concerns. We outline them below.

**Risky Behavior**
Alcohol overdose can result in poor judgement and make it difficult to think clearly. For some people, this can cause them to behave in ways that put them more at risk of harm. Many states and localities, including Virginia, have put temporary limits during the pandemic on restaurants serving alcohol. Effective November 16, 2020, Virginia establishments serving alcohol will have to close by midnight; and on-site alcohol sales and consumption will end at 10 p.m. Here’s why: the more alcohol someone drinks, the more likely they are to forego COVID-19 safety precautions such as mask-wearing, avoiding large groups, and staying 6 feet apart from others.

**Emergency Care**
Alcohol reduces our reaction time, balance, and coordination. This can lead to a fall or other accident which might be serious enough to require medical care. Healthcare facilities have worked hard and taken numerous measures to ensure that patients, staff, and visitors can remain safe from the virus. But the best protection of all is not to enter a facility in the first place unless it is absolutely necessary. Stay safe = stay home.

**Germs Welcome**
Drinking alcohol will NOT protect you from COVID-19. It will not disinfect your mouth, throat, or body. In fact, the opposite is true. Drinking too much alcohol can weaken your immune system, making your body a much easier target for germs, including the flu or COVID-19.

**From Bad to Worse**
In addition to a range of negative physical health associations, excessive alcohol use may lead to or worsen existing health problems. This includes mental health problems such as anxiety or depression, which may already be heightened by social isolation, financial worries, and more.

**Alcohol and Kids Don’t Mix**
Having more alcohol present in the home increases the risk that children could get into it. Teens and tweens stuck at home all day might be tempted to experiment with alcohol. Even small amounts of alcohol could be dangerous for younger children. “Our nurses become quickly concerned when they receive a call about a small child getting into alcohol,” says Dr. Jennifer Ross, pediatrician and medical toxicology fellow at the Blue Ridge Poison Center. “Because of their small size, relatively little amounts of alcohol can cause dangerous health effects in children, such as sedation, slowed breathing, and low blood sugar levels.” Parents and caregivers are advised to keep alcohol stored up high, out of the sight and reach of little ones.

If you or someone you care about needs help with alcohol or other substance abuse, call the SAMHSA Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or visit them online.

If you suspect someone has overdosed on alcohol, or that a child has swallowed any amount, call the Blue Ridge Poison Center right away for emergency medical advice: 1-800-222-1222. Do not try to make the person vomit and do not let an unconscious person “sleep it off.” Our help is free and confidential.
while turning it. This was difficult for children to do. His design was the winning entry in a contest sponsored by the Ontario Association to Control Poisonings, a group founded by Canadian pediatrician Henri Breault. According to his wife, Dr. Breault came home from the hospital one night and said, “You know, I’ve had it. I am tired of pumping children’s stomachs when they’re taking pills that they shouldn’t be having. I’ve got to do something about it.”

Dr. Breault started a campaign to require the Palm N Turn cap to be used all over Canada. Soon after, the cap was tested in the U.S., and it was so successful at reducing childhood poisonings that the law was quickly drafted and signed by President Nixon on December 30, 1970.

Today there are many different types of child resistant packages, for all sorts of hazardous products. Some require the user to squeeze while turning; some require lining up arrows on the bottle and cap; some have false lids or other tricky devices that children cannot easily operate. But they all have one thing in common: they have passed a very strict test to earn the label “child resistant.” The rules are devised by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, which is also responsible for overseeing all PPPA regulations:

- At least 50 children between the ages of 42-51 months old must be used to test the container.
- Each child is given a closed (but empty) container and asked to open it.
- If the bottle remains unopened after 5 minutes, the tester gives the child a visual demonstration. The tester can also say to the child “You can use your teeth if you want to.”
- The child gets 5 more minutes to try to open the container.

If 80% of the children cannot open the container within 10 minutes, the container passes and can be certified as child resistant.

But the testing is not over! In order to be certified as child resistant, a container must also prove that it’s not too difficult for adults to open and reclose. If that has you scratching your head, Kristin Wenger, Education Coordinator of the Blue Ridge Poison Center, explains: “Studies show that when an adult has too much trouble opening a child resistant cap, they don’t use it. They might just leave the cap off.

continued page 4
or store the medicine in something else like a baggie or a regular bottle. This puts children at greater risk.” Likewise, if an adult cannot successfully reclose the locking device, the cap is worthless.

By its very definition, a child resistant cap is not child proof. “If as many as 20% of children could open a bottle during a test, they might be able to open it at your house, too.” Wenger says. Does this mean the use of a medicine bottle with a CR cap is worthless? “Absolutely not! Those caps do keep many children out of medicine. But they are not designed to do the job alone. Parents and caregivers still need to take additional steps to keep children safe.” The most effective action is to store all medicine and other dangerous products up high, in a place where children can’t see them and can’t reach them.

“Remember CLICK, UP, AND AWAY,” Wenger offers. “Click the cap shut. Put the container up and away. It only takes a moment and it really does make a difference.”

Seasons Greetings from the Blue Ridge Poison Center! We are always open. Even on holidays.

1-800-222-1222

News & Notes

Got 5 minutes? The Blue Ridge Poison Center is conducting a survey. All information gathered will help guide our education and outreach efforts in the coming year. You might win a $20 Amazon gift card!

Access the survey here, or visit our website to find a link to the survey at the bottom of our home page. Your responses are anonymous. We thank you!

Congratulations to Blue Ridge Poison Center nurse Michael Brookshire, BSN, RN, and now CSPI, who recently passed the national certification exam for Specialists in Poison Information. The exam requires months of study and years of preparation, and is notoriously difficult. We are proud to have you on our team, Michael!