

THE BALTIMORE STATEMENT ON THE USE OF OVER-THE-COUNTER COUGH AND COLD MEDICATIONS BY CHILDREN FIVE AND UNDER

Children are afflicted by the common cold about six to eight times per year. Although children will improve without any treatment within seven to ten days from these viral infections, parents are often worried and frustrated to see their child ill. Parents seek either a cure or symptom relief to make their child feel more comfortable. Schools, day care centers and work responsibilities place tremendous pressures on parents to make their child better so as not to disrupt routines.

Yet there are no cures. Parents spend more than two billion dollars a year on over-the-counter cough and cold preparations. In studies of children from six months to five years of age, there are no data to support the effectiveness of these products in reducing or relieving symptoms or in providing a cure. Their side effects can be dangerous. These dangers include accidental ingestions, but more specifically elevation of blood pressure and heart rate, risk of stroke, effects on the heart, and in some cases death. According to the Maryland Poison Center, approximately 900 children in Maryland under the age of five overdosed on over the counter cough and cold medications in 2004. Over the last several years in Baltimore alone, at least four deaths of children under four years old have been linked to parents giving their children excessive doses of cold medications.

Since the evidence shows that these products have no benefit, and the side effects may indeed cause harm, we recommend that families be aware of these risks and not use over-the-counter cough and cold medications for children ages five and under.

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