



## Office of the Child Advocate Connecticut Child Fatality Review Panel

### Public Health Alert: When is Benadryl Safe to Use with Children?

- ⊘ Adults should never use Benadryl or other antihistamines to get infants to go to sleep or to be quiet.
- ✓ Only use antihistamines like Benadryl when prescribed for certain medical conditions by a licensed medical provider.
- ? Call your local Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 for immediate help in case of poisoning or with questions and concerns.

#### What is Benadryl (diphenhydramine)?

Benadryl is an antihistamine used to treat medical problems like allergies, hay fever, the common cold and itching from skin conditions like eczema and poison ivy. Symptoms include rash, itching, watery eyes, itchy eyes/nose/throat, cough, runny nose, sneezing and hives. It is also used for motion sickness. Antihistamines may cause severe drowsiness, hallucinations, uncontrollable shaking (seizures), serious abnormal heart beats, and sometimes extreme excitement (<http://www.webmd.com/drugs/2/drug-5680/benadryl-oral/details>).

#### Only Use Antihistamines on the Advice of a Pediatrician and Never to Make Baby Sleep

Parents and other adults who care for your children should not give antihistamines like Benadryl to help a baby sleep.

***“Giving sleep aids to my children caused the death of my infant daughter. I was using Benadryl to help my children sleep during the night so that they would not disturb their father while I was working third shift. I never meant to harm, let alone cause my infant’s death. As a result I also lost custody of my other children and ended up serving a prison sentence for my actions”. Justine Barber***

An online poll done in 2011 by the Today show and Parenting magazine found that of more than 26,000 mothers who responded, one in five admitted to giving their children medicine such as Benadryl or Dramamine to get

through a big event, like a long car ride or plane trip. One in 12 mothers responded that they regularly dosed their children with sleep-inducing medication, like Benadryl or Dramamine, just to get some peace and quiet on a normal night.

## Antihistamine Poisoning

At least 4 deaths of infants and toddlers in Connecticut over the past two years were due to poisoning from Benadryl or other antihistamines. Over the past 15 years, there have been several case reports published in peer-reviewed medical journals of deaths from Benadryl (diphenhydramine).

### What about Other Over-The-Counter Antihistamines?

Check the drug facts label on the back of over-the-counter medicine packaging to see if an antihistamine is listed as an active ingredient in any of the medicines in your home. All antihistamines may cause severe drowsiness, hallucinations, uncontrollable shaking (seizures), serious abnormal heart beats, and sometimes extreme excitement. Ask your pharmacist about medicines that have antihistamines in them.

Common antihistamines are:

- Benadryl, Nytol, Unisom, Sominex (diphenhydramine)
- Chlor-Trimeton (chlorpheniramine)
- Dramamine, Bonine (meclizine)

Antihistamines can be found alone or in combination with other pain-relieving medicines like acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil), and aspirin.

Common antihistamine combination medicine names are:

- Coricidin
- Triaminic
- Alka-Seltzer
- Dimetapp
- Tylenol PM
- Advil PM

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### References/Resources

1. Baker AM, Johnson DG, Levisky JA, Hearn WL, Moore KA, Levine B, et al. Fatal diphenhydramine intoxication in infants. *Journal of forensic sciences*. 2003;48(2):425-8.
2. Nine JS, Rund CR. Fatality from diphenhydramine monointoxication: a case report and review of the infant, pediatric, and adult literature. *Am J Forensic Med Pathol*. 2006;27(1):36-41.
3. <http://www.today.com/parents/medicating-your-kids-peace-quiet-it-ever-ok-849460>
4. <http://www.webmd.com/parenting/baby/tc/quick-tips-getting-baby-to-sleep-get-started#1>
5. <http://www.ctoec.org/chill>.

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## TIPS TO HELP YOUR BABY FALL ASLEEP

- ✓ **At night, set up a soothing routine.** Give your baby a bath, sing lullabies, and read a book aloud to help your baby relax and signal that it is time to sleep. Don't get your baby excited with active play right before sleep.
- ✓ **When your baby is getting sleepy, put your baby in the crib in a quiet, darkened room.** This will help your baby learn to go to sleep in the crib on their back.
- ✓ **Remember to put your baby down to sleep on his or her back.** Do not put your baby down to sleep with you in your own bed, to reduce the risk of sudden death. It is fine to room share, but do not bed share.
- ✓ **Make sure that adults taking care of your baby do not give medicines like antihistamines.** Medicines like Benadryl should not be given to your baby to make him sleep. Even other over-the-counter medicines can be dangerous. Call the pediatrician before you or another adult starts a new medicine for your baby or toddler.
- ✓ **Frustrated with trying to get your baby to fall asleep?** Try all of your soothing techniques like changing or feeding the baby, talking softly or singing to the baby. If nothing works, take a break, and call a friend or family member for help. Never shake your baby. It can be dangerous and even deadly.

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