

Consensus statement on the safer use of cough and cold medicine in children – recommendation for Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Paediatric Society organized a forum on “Safer use of cough and cold medicine in children – recommendation for Hong Kong” at Queen Elizabeth Hospital on Wednesday 8th April 2009 and the following statements were drawn in regards to the use of PRESCRIPTIONAL cough and cold medicine in children:

1. It is of utmost importance to make the correct medical diagnosis before instigating treatment. Exclusion of complications of acute upper respiratory tract infection and other serious life-threatening illness are important reasons for seeking medical attention.
2. When used as a symptomatic treatment, cough and cold medicine is beneficial in relieving sufferings and providing comfort to children with acute respiratory tract infections. However, such medicine will not alter the natural course of the underlying illness.
3. Cough and cold medicines potentially have serious side effects and must be used cautiously in children. Dosages should be appropriate for the age and body weight of the children. Their use should be discouraged in young infants less than 3 months of age. Cough suppressants and decongestants should be avoided in such infants.
4. It is important to avoid polypharmacy in children as it would increase the chance of adverse drug interactions and decrease the children’s adherence to drug regimens.
5. It is important to educate parents on the safe use of cough and cold medicine in children. Cough and cold medicine should only be prescribed after careful consideration of the pros and cons of using such medicine, the stage and severity of illness and the individual characteristics of each child by health care professionals.

Additional conclusions were made in addressing the safe use of OVER-THE-COUNTER cough and cold medicine in children:

1. Over the counter cough and cold medicine should be avoided in children under the age of 2 years without advice from health care professionals. Parents are advised to talk to their doctors if they have any questions about the use of cough and cold medicine in children.
2. Over-the-counter cough and cold medicine often contains more than one active ingredient (such as an antihistamine, a decongestant, a cough suppressant, an expectorant or an antipyretic). Children taking more than one over-the-counter cough and cold medicines that contain the same or similar active ingredients could result in serious and potentially life threatening adverse events.
3. Do not give children over-the-counter cough and cold medicine that is labeled for adult only. It is important to follow the drug company's instructions when using over-the-counter cough and cold medicine, particularly in young children. Overuse or misuse of such product can lead to serious and potentially life threatening adverse events.
4. Consult health care professionals promptly if the child's condition does not improve or worsens with over-the-counter cough and cold medicine.

Prepared by Dr Grace Poon, Secretary, Child Advocacy Committee, Hong Kong Paediatric Society, after the Forum on "Safer use of cough and cold medicine in children – recommendation for Hong Kong" held on 8th April 2009. The Council of the Hong Kong Paediatric Society endorsed this statement on 17th June 2009.