How to Pick the Best Allergy Medicine for Your Kids

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As allergy season commences this spring, children's health experts at the University of Michigan caution parents to make sure they're not giving their kids the wrong doses or kinds of over-the-counter (OTC) medications for their coughs, sneezes and congestion, Science Daily reports.

The warning comes after a report from a national poll on children's health conducted by the university's C.S. Mott Children's Hospital found that many adults find it hard to choose the right type and dose of allergy medicine for their youngest family members. The survey focused on a wide variety of OTC drugs, including antihistamines (to address runny noses and itchy eyes), decongestants (to unclog stuffy noses) and corticosteroids (which often come in sprays or drops that reduce inflammation in the eyes and nose).

Researchers based their findings on responses from a national sample of 1,066 parents of children ages 6 to 12 who were surveyed about their experiences with over-the-counter allergy medications. The poll showed that more than half of parents in the study administered one of these types of drugs to their school-aged child during the past year.

According to the study, 85 percent of parents who gave their kids allergy medications used a drug they already had in the house. In addition, one in five parents admitted that they didn't check the medicine's expiration date before dispensing it.

The poll also found that while most parents gave their kids a special allergy medicine intended for children, nearly one in seven parents admitted they gave their kids a drug made for adults. Of those parents, two thirds said they calculated a partial dose of the adult meds to give their child. But the remaining one third said they meted out a full adult portion to their kids when needed.

"Doses greater than recommended for children can result in more severe side effects," advised Gary Freed, MD, MPH, a pediatrician at Mott Children's Hospital and codirector of the poll. What's more, "some parents may be picking allergy medication based on their interpretation of different advice they've heard, which may not always be accurate," he continued.

To help parents shop for the option that best fits their child's needs, Freed urged parents to always read the active ingredients on allergy medicine labels and what they're intended to treat. The report also noted that many OTC allergy meds contain special instructions to parents for dosages

to give to children under 12.

The best bet, however, is for moms and dads to check with their doctors, pharmacists and other health care providers before doling out any allergy medication to their kids.

Click here for seven tips you need to survive this allergy season.

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