

## **How to Manage the Children's Medication Shortage**

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Parents are concerned by the empty shelves in pharmacies, especially since kids are back at school where viruses can spread easily.\*

There is a shortage of children's pain relievers and medication for children with fevers, colds and flus.\* This includes liquid Children's Tylenol and chewable acetaminophen tablets.\* This drug shortage also happened earlier this year in the spring and at the end of July.\*

Jen Belcher, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives for the Ontario Pharmacists Association stated: "We are seeing a shortage of these medications through the supply chain which is resulting in pharmacies not being able to reorder medications as people purchase them."\*

A drug shortage means that suppliers are not able to produce enough of that drug to meet demand.\* The issue with these children's medications is equally driven by not enough supply and high demand.\* Over the summer, the number of children who were sick with colds, COVID-19, and other respiratory tract infections was higher than average.\* Belcher acknowledges that the increasing demand could be a result of parents stocking up out of a desire to avoid the stigma of having your child sneezing or coughing in public.\*

Health Canada first confirmed the shortage in mid-August.\* At the time, Health Canada urged "Canadians not to buy more paediatric/infant/children's acetaminophen and ibuprofen medications than usual [to] ensure that those in need have access to the medications and will help prevent drug shortages."\*

Unfortunately, the drug shortage is back, but there are still options to care for your child. Keep reading to see what you could do, and what you definitely shouldn't do!

### **What You Can Do**

- 1. If your child is congested, use: saline drops or a saline spray, suction, and humidifiers.\***
- 2. If your child/ren has a fever, paediatricians recommend acetaminophen (Brand Name: Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Brand Names: Advil and Motrin).\*,\***

According to CTV News, some parents "have visited compounding pharmacies for acetaminophen produced by lab technicians", but it's more expensive than it would be at a pharmacy.\*

**3. Know when medication is and isn't necessary. If your child/ren has a fever, dress them in lighter clothes, put a cool cloth on their skin, and monitor them.\***

If an older child is still active, alert, awake, and eating, it may not be necessary to use pain relievers.\* Consult with a family doctor or a walk-in clinic physician about this decision.\*

“Generally speaking, we think of fever as a good thing, it's our body's response to try to help fight infection,” says Dr. Justine Cohen-Silver, a staff paediatrician at the Women and Children's Health Program at St. Joseph's Health Centre and St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto.\*

However, if your child/ren is “really lethargic, or is having difficulty breathing, is breathing rapidly, those are indications that they are dehydrated and should go to the emergency department,” says Dr. Anna Banerji, a paediatrician and infectious disease specialist at Termerty Faculty of Medicine and Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto.\*

According to Dr. Doug Campbell, the deputy chief of paediatrics at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto's Unity Health Network, if an infant is three months old or younger and has a fever with any temperature above 38 degrees, they need to be assessed “urgently by a physician,” and this is a good reason to go to an emergency department.\*

**4. If you can't find the product of your choice at your pharmacy, visit other pharmacies and talk to pharmacists about other over-the-counter options.\***

Danielle Paes, the chief pharmacist officer at the Canadian Pharmacists Association, said that community pharmacists are a “key resource and strongest ally when it comes to managing medication.”\* According to the Government of Canada's webpage on drug shortages, “Patients should consult with their pharmacists and doctors about other potential treatment options.”\*

**5. To prevent your child/ren from getting sick, tell them to wear a mask when playing with others.\***

According to Dr. Dina Kulik, an emergency room paediatrician in the Greater Toronto Area, “It's unprecedented. The amount of sick kids we've seen this July rivals a typical January or February in terms of viral illness. There's a lot of copic illness going around but also lots of other viruses as well like hand for the mouth disease and stomach bugs. It might just be a matter of kids really playing together again, mostly unmasked, in close quarters.”\*

**6. To give your child more protection from COVID-19, make sure they get their booster shots and flu shots.\***

Although parents are concerned about how they will take care of their children in case they get sick, the number of children in Ontario under the age of five who are vaccinated against COVID-19 is only about 6% even though this age group has been eligible for vaccination for two months now.\*

Dr. Banerji commented on how this is likely because of misinformation: “(People think), ‘Oh COVID’s not so bad. It’s just a mild cold in young kids, I don’t really need to worry about it.’ There’s a lot of, I think, denial that kids, especially younger kids, can get it and get very, very seriously sick with that.”\*

In addition to misinformation, there is also vaccine hesitancy.\* Dr. Paul Roumeliotis, the medical officer of health for the Eastern Ontario Health Unit, said “I’m a paediatrician, I know that parents are always hesitant -- particularly for younger children and babies -- be it a vaccination, or any medication that comes out.”\*

“One of the messages that we need to tell people is that although that vaccine is not as effective as we’d like to be for person-to-person transmission, it’s certainly highly effective against severe disease and complications thereof.”\*

Last week, Public Health Ontario reported 17 infants younger than one year old being hospitalized due to COVID-19, and, throughout the pandemic, infants in this age category have had a higher rate of hospitalization compared to older children and teenagers.\*

“It’s a delicate balancing act here that we have to do when talking about this. You don’t want to come across as forcing a foreign thing into your child’s body, as we see the population is very sensitive to that kind of narrative. We don’t want to come across as being fearmongers trying to force the world back into lockdown .... But at the same time, you just want to advocate for overall child health,” says Raywat Deonandan, an epidemiologist and associate professor in the faculty of health sciences at the University of Ottawa.\*

Keeping your child/ren up-to-date on their vaccinations will both give them more protection from sickness and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the community.\*

## **Final Thoughts**

Although there is a drug shortage, multiple physicians and Health Canada agree that you should NOT give your sick child/ren expired medication.\* It isn’t safe, and it might not even be effective.\*

Also, I know it’s anxiety-inducing to not have children’s pain relievers and cold and flu medication, but please do not stock up on medication during your next visit to the pharmacy.\* Hoarding the medication that is already available will only make the problem worse.\*

If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at [www.ontario.ca/coronavirus](http://www.ontario.ca/coronavirus). Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675