



Poison Prevention: One Pill Can Kill

By Elizabeth Murray, DO, MBA, FAAP

Kids are curious—and they sure do love putting things in their mouths! Exploring what objects feel and taste like is part of how they learn about the world around them. Children's non-stop curiosity is what brings all the great (and sometimes silly) questions and creativity, but it can also lead to trouble.

Some days as an emergency medicine doctor, I feel like I've seen it all. From a marshmallow stuck in a child's airway (</English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Choking-Prevention.aspx>) to a child with lead poisoning after swallowing a small toy (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/How-to-Buy-Safe-Toys.aspx>) to keep it away from his little brother. Sometimes, these emergencies hit close to home.



The Gillans' story below may be hard to read but brings to life how important it is to do all we can to keep our kids safe.

Parent Parent

One Pill Can Kill

By MaryBeth and Adam Gillan

Our beautiful, happy daughter Maisie died from a methadone overdose at 9 months and 15 days old. No one in our house is prescribed methadone. In our neighbor's house, where she found the pill that killed her, no one (to our knowledge) is prescribed methadone.

However, over the holidays, a relative who was prescribed methadone visited the neighbors' house. A few days later at a dinner party Maisie showed off her new ability to crawl for delighted onlookers. Unknown to us, the relative lost a pill in the kitchen and did not recover it. The pill found Maisie's hand and her hand found her mouth. Six adults, three of them doctors, were at the party and Maisie was supervised the entire time. We left the party around her bedtime. She appeared sleepy, so we told her we loved her and put her to bed.

Hours later she was dead. We found her unresponsive the following morning, performed CPR and called first responders immediately. We were hoping for a miracle. We were hoping our baby would be saved and we would hold her again. We buried her six days later. There are open plots on either side of Maisie's headstone for her parents. It wasn't supposed to be this way.

For 10 days, it was assumed that Maisie dies of SIDS (</English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/Preventing-SIDS.aspx>) but we eventually found out she died from an overdose from an adult dosage of methadone. Medicine can and does save lives, but we do not treat it with the care and security that we should. Medicine needs to be accounted for, it needs to be locked away, and it needs to be distributed in single unit doses, also known as blister packaging.

about safe storage and safe handling with everyone you know who takes medications. They can be hard conversations, but one pill can kill, and we do not want it to happen to you or your loved ones.

Maisie's story - how common is it?

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We know that about 50,000 U.S. children visit the Emergency Department every year because they swallowed something potentially dangerous. The good news, most of those children go home without having suffered any serious harm. The scary news is that about 9,000 children need to be hospitalized, and some, like Maisie, die from the poisoning.

Medicines are powerful lifesavers, but can also be dangerous—especially to babies, children and teens.

Think "up and away"

The best way to protect kids from unintentional poisoning is to put medicines away (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/medication-safety/Pages/Medication-Safety-Tips.aspx>) safely. Use these tips to keep children from finding medicines in your home:

- Store all medications in a cupboard or high shelf, well out of a child's sight. In about half of over-the-counter medication (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/medication-safety/Pages/Using-Over-the-Counter-Medicines-With-Your-Child.aspx>) poisonings, the child climbed onto a chair, toy or other object to reach the medication.
- Keep medicines in their original containers, with child-safety caps.
- If there are controlled substances (like prescription pain medications or ADHD (</English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/Pages/Determining-ADHD-Medication-Treatments.aspx>) medicine) consider using a locked box for extra safety.
- Keep track of how many pills are in the bottle and write the start date on the label. This way, if a spill occurs, you'll know if any are missing.
- When giving your child medicine, lean over a counter or table. This helps contain any accidental spills.
- Any medication can be dangerous, so treat all products with the same respect. We worry about opioids, but some blood pressure and diabetes medications can be fatal to a toddler who swallows only one pill.
- If a medication spills, vacuum or sweep the area as an extra precaution to ensure nothing is missed.
- Dispose of unused medications—especially opioids (</English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/The-Opioid-Epidemic.aspx>)—at pharmacies, drug "take back" programs or doctors' offices
- Know basic first aid (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/First-Aid-Guide.aspx>) and keep the Poison Center Number (1-800-222-1222) stored in your phone.
- Get into the practice of safe medication storage, starting as soon as your baby is born.

That terrible morning



I've known the Gillan family for years. On the morning Maisie died, I was the on-call physician for the team that reviews all unexpected deaths of children. The phone calls started to come in. First the investigators, asking if I thought they were missing anything. Her room was perfect, all safe sleep guidelines were followed, the house was completely child-safe.

Then my mother called, as soon as she heard. Since we knew the family so well, this might have been the hardest of the calls to take. A wonderful, happy, healthy and so very loved little child had been lost, and the family was devastated.

I am honored to have been gifted a "Maisie pin" that I wear on my white coat. It serves as a launch point to talk to families about poisoning prevention so that maybe, no other families have to suffer.

More information

- Medication Safety Tips (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/medication-safety/Pages/Medication-Safety-Tips.aspx>)
- How to Safely Dispose of Old Medicines (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/medication-safety/Pages/How-to-Safely-Dispose-Old-Medicines.aspx>)
- Poison Prevention & Treatment Tips (</English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/Poison-Prevention.aspx>)

- [webPoisonControl \(https://triage.webpoisoncontrol.org/#%21/exclusions\)](https://triage.webpoisoncontrol.org/#%21/exclusions) (Poison Control Centers) [Back to Top](#)
- [Purses: Fashion's Most Deadly Accessory \(https://www.aap.org/en-us/aap-voices/Pages/Purses-Fashion%27s-Most-Deadly-Accessory.aspx\)](https://www.aap.org/en-us/aap-voices/Pages/Purses-Fashion%27s-Most-Deadly-Accessory.aspx) (AAP Voices)

About Dr. Murray



Elizabeth Murray, DO, MBA, FAAP, is board-certified in pediatrics and pediatric emergency medicine. She is an Assistant Professor in both the Departments of Pediatrics and Emergency Medicine at the University of Rochester. Prior to entering medical school, Dr. Murray completed an MBA at the University of Rochester's Simon School of Business Administration. She is a spokesperson of the American Academy of Pediatrics and can be seen regularly on Good Day Rochester, ABC Affiliate Rochester, NY.

About the Gillan Family



Adam and MaryBeth Gillan reside in Rochester, NY with their three children Rhona (pictured), Maisie (pictured), and Conway (not pictured). Adam works in the consumer packaged goods industry and is an alum of Villanova University (BS) and the University of Rochester (MBA). MaryBeth is an alum of SUNY Brockport and splits time between the home and personal training. Both Adam and MaryBeth continue to parent Maisie as an advocate at all levels for improved poison control standards, safer drug packaging, and child safety laws.

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