

# Taking Your Medicines Safely

## PROGRAM LEADER GUIDE



March 2012

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Health Resources and Services Administration



# Overview

## *Taking Your Medicines Safely: A Community Senior Center Education Program*

- This program was funded by the Poison Control Program, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).
- This program does not give medical advice. Please direct questions about your medicines to your pharmacist, doctor, or another trusted healthcare professional. If you ever feel you have been poisoned, taken too much medicine, or taken the wrong medicine, call the toll-free Poison Help number 1-800-222-1222. This number will connect you to a poison expert at your local poison center.
- This publication lists non-federal resources in order to provide additional information to consumers. The views and content in these resources have not been formally approved by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Listing these resources is not an endorsement by HHS or its components.

# Training Module Objectives

**By the end of this web-based training module, you will...**

- Be prepared to lead a session that teaches seniors about taking their medicines safely

**By the end of the program, participants will...**

- Know questions to ask about medicines they use
- Know ways they can keep track of the medicines they take
- Be aware of problems that may be caused by the interaction of some medicines, herbals, supplements, and foods
- Be aware of the importance of keeping medicines where children and teens cannot find them
- Be aware of local poison centers as a resource for help with accidents involving medicines and other poisonings

# **Taking *Your Medicines Safely***

## **Program Objectives**

**After the program, seniors will begin to...**

- Ask their healthcare provider (i.e., pharmacist) any questions they have about their medicines
- Adopt a method of tracking their medicine-taking if they were not using one when they participated in the program
- Move their medicines to a location where children and teens cannot find them if they had not already done so when they participated in the program

# Instructions for the Program Leader

This Guide has been divided into two sections:

1. Preparation: What to do before leading a TYMS program in your senior center
2. Implementation: How to lead a TYMS program in your senior center

# Before the Medicine Safety Education Program

What you should do two weeks before you give the presentation:

1. Promote the program using the Promotional Flyer.\*
2. Print the Participant Guides.\*
3. Contact your local poison center (1-800-222-1222) to request available giveaways, brochures, etc.
4. If possible, obtain a flip chart (or alternative) for use while playing tic-tac-toe with participants.

\*These materials are free and available for download.

# Who Should You Recruit?

You should recruit older adults who:

- Take medicine(s)
- Can read or listen
- Can understand
- Are willing to participate

# Learn about Poison Centers

Please visit this website to learn more about poison centers:

<http://www.poisonhelp.hrsa.gov/poison-centers/about-poison-centers/index.html>

# Follow the Program Agenda (~ 25 Minutes)

<b>Time (minutes)</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>What You Will Do to Facilitate the Medicine Safety Education Program</b>	<b>What Program Participants Will Do During the Medicine Safety Education Program</b>
1	Introduction	See Page 12 of this Training Guide	Refer to Page 1 of The Participant Guide
14	Medicine Safety Education	See Pages 13–30 of this Training Guide	Refer to Pages 2-10 of The Participant Guide
5*	Tic-Tac-Toe Game	See Pages 31-32 of this Training Guide	Refer to Pages 11-12 of The Participant Guide
5	Poison Center Information	See Pages 33–40 of this Training Guide	Refer to Pages 13-16 of The Participant Guide

\*Note: When playing the game for the first time, it may take longer than 5 minutes.

# Important Things to Remember

**At no time during this presentation should you provide medical advice! Please refer all medical questions of any kind to a trusted health care professional. For problems with taking the wrong medicine or too much medicine, refer participants to the toll-free Poison Help number (1-800-222-1222) that will connect callers to their local poison center.**

# Training Guide Information

- Quotation marks highlight the scripted portions of the program (in the following slides). Remember to hold up materials so that the audience can see what you are describing.
- The following slides are an example of what a presenter would say when delivering this program.

# Deliver the Medicine Safety Education Program

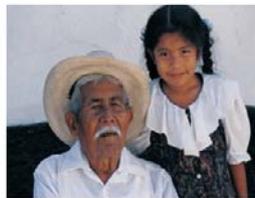
**Before reviewing the slides with the participants, tell them the following:**

“There is no cost to you to participate in today’s activities. Specific questions about medication practices cannot be answered as part of this presentation. You will also not be equipped to answer such questions after participating in this session. Please contact your pharmacist or doctor for clarification on medicine questions. If you feel that you have taken, or someone you know, has taken too much medicine or the wrong medicine, call the toll-free Poison Help number at 1-800-222-1222. You will be connected to your local poison center. If someone is unconscious or has trouble breathing call 911.”

# Slide 1

## Taking Your Medicines Safely

A COMMUNITY SENIOR CENTER EDUCATION PROGRAM



(Direct participants to Section 2 of their *Participant Guide*.)

“Let’s begin with the program. We are going to start with a short presentation. You can follow along with your *Participant Guide*. After that, we’re going to play a game that uses information from today’s discussion.”

# Slide 2

## Why Are We Here?

- To learn about older adults and medicines —
  - Most take at least 1 prescription drug
  - Half take 3 or more medicines
- To prevent potential poisoning from prescriptions and other remedies
- To learn tips for managing your medicines



“Why are we here today? Over the last few years, calls to poison centers involving adults over the age of 65 have increased. Often these calls are related to medicine problems such as taking too much of a medicine or combining medicines.”

“Five out of six people 65 and older take at least one prescription drug, and almost half take three or more medicines. Medicine safety is important to all of us. The goal of this program is to teach ways to prevent medicine problems from happening to you.”

# Slide 3

## Take Medicines Safely

### Medicine

- Prescription
- Over-the-Counter



### Medicine can interact with:

- Herbals
- Vitamins
- Supplements
- Certain foods and juices

“For today’s program, the term ‘medicines’ includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines. Herbals, vitamins, dietary supplements, and some foods and fruit juices are not considered medicine. But taking these with medicines can sometimes affect how we respond to medicine.”

“An example of an herbal is St. John’s Wort that is used by some for depression, anxiety, and/or sleep disorders.”

“An example of a dietary supplement is Calcium. Calcium supplements help build strong bones and teeth.”

“When it comes to medicines, we are in charge. We may buy them at the pharmacy, the supermarket, and the health food store. By choosing and combining certain products, we may affect how we respond to our medicine.”

# Slide 4

## Reliable Sources of Information

- Doctors
- Nurses
- Pharmacists
- Local poison centers



“An important step in taking charge of our health is to gather the information we need. We gather health information from a variety of sources, such as doctors, nurses, pharmacists, poison centers, ads, and stories on television, in magazines, from friends and family, from books, and from the Internet. Doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and poison centers are reliable sources of information about medicines.”

**(Ask group how many people use the Internet? If none, skip Slide 5. If some participants answer yes, move to Slide 5.)**

# Slide 5

## Finding Good Sources on the Internet

- Government, educational, or non-profit websites
- Up-to-date information



“Not all information on the Internet is reliable. First, check the source of the site. Government and educational sites, which are reliable sources, have Web addresses ending with .gov or .edu. Some, but not all sites ending in .org, .com, or .net are also good sources. Also, check that the information is current by looking at the bottom of the web page for the date the site was last updated.”

“Later in this presentation we will provide some examples of reliable sources for information about medication safety.”

# Slide 6

## Poisoning Exposures

- ❑ Not just a problem in children
- ❑ A poison is a substance that is harmful to you
- ❑ Anything can be poisonous



“When we hear about poisonings, we often think about children. But poisoning can happen to everyone including adults.”

“A poison is any substance that is harmful to your body when eaten, inhaled, absorbed through the skin, or injected. If enough is taken, any substance can be poisonous.”

“Many calls to poison centers across the country involve adults over 60 years with medicine-related poisoning. Unintentional poisonings may be caused by interactions of medicines and other remedies. Let’s discuss what we mean by an interaction. What do you think this means?”

**(Ask for answers from the group. After you get a few answers or no answers, move on with script.)**

# Slide 7

## Interactions

### Interaction

- Combined action of 2 or more things
- Could create an unwanted effect or poisoning



“A general definition would be a combined action of two or more things. In the case of medicines, this could be something good or it could mean an unwanted effect or an unintentional poisoning.”

“Certain combinations of medicines with other medicines, juices, herbals, or vitamins may change the way the medicine works. This can result in the medicines not working at all or an unintentional poisoning. Can anyone think of a possible interaction you know about or have experienced yourself?”

**(PAUSE. Allow the group to give examples. Acknowledge volunteers and move on with script.)**

“I want to take you through three different stories. Then we can discuss them and what the potential problems are, if any. These are only examples. Every person and situation is different.”

# Slide 8

## Story #1

- Joe has been taking a blood thinner for the past year
- He's concerned about his family history of heart disease
- He adds a daily aspirin



“Story 1: Joe has been taking warfarin (Coumadin), a blood thinner, once a day for the past year. One day while watching television, Joe sees a commercial promoting a daily children’s aspirin for a healthy heart. Joe’s father died of a heart attack at a young age, so he figures it would be a good idea to start taking aspirin himself. Joe starts taking a daily aspirin. Is what Joe did a good idea? Why or why not?”

**(PAUSE. Let the group give answers, then move on with script.)**

“Let’s talk about the problem. First, no one should take daily aspirin without first speaking with their doctor. Second, the medicine he is already taking, warfarin, is a blood thinner. Taking aspirin with it might be a problem, because aspirin can also thin the blood, causing symptoms such as easy bruising to unexpected bleeding. Daily aspirin is also associated with other risks. Talk with your doctor first.”

“Here’s another thing to think about.”

# Slide 9

## Story #2

- Ellen regularly rides her bike
- She drinks grapefruit juice every morning for Vitamin C
- Doctor prescribes cholesterol-lowering medicine



“Story 2: Ellen rides her bike daily and always drinks grapefruit juice at breakfast. She feels healthy with tons of energy. After her annual checkup, Ellen’s doctor said her cholesterol was too high and prescribed a cholesterol-lowering medicine. To keep healthy, Ellen decides to keep drinking the grapefruit juice every morning and adds a glass at lunch. Is this a good idea or not?”

**(PAUSE. Let the group answer, then move on with script.)**

“Let’s discuss the potential problem. Grapefruit juice competes with the way some medicines are handled by the body, resulting in a build-up of medicine in the body. This could lead to muscle problems.”

# Slide 10

## Story #3

- Sara has a very full, active retirement
- She takes an over-the-counter pain reliever for minor aches and pains
- She develops a miserable cold, so she takes a multi-symptom cold medicine



“Story 3: Sara recently retired from her job with the city government after 30 years. She is enjoying her free time, going on hikes, boating, and visiting her grandchildren. Sara takes a common pain reliever, acetaminophen, for her aches and pains in the cold weather. When Sara develops a cold, she begins taking a multi-symptom medicine. Is this a problem?”

**(PAUSE. Let the group answer, then move on with script.)**

“The problem is that Sara was already taking acetaminophen and then she added the cold medicine, which may also contain acetaminophen. Even taking a little more of acetaminophen than directed could potentially cause liver damage.”

“These stories demonstrate examples of potential problems from medicine interactions. There are many common medicines and other remedies that can interact and result in serious health issues. Always speak with the doctor or pharmacist when making changes in the medicine you are taking. If you take the wrong medicine or too much medicine, call your poison center. As we saw, something as innocent as grapefruit juice, can affect how our medicines work.”

# Slide 11

## 6 Questions

1. What is the name of my medicine?
2. Why am I taking this medicine?
3. What side effects could I have?
4. How much do I take and how often? 
5. What should I do if I miss a dose or double the dose?
6. What should I avoid while taking this medicine?

“To help you remember some of the questions to ask your health care provider, I want to discuss six important questions to keep in mind:

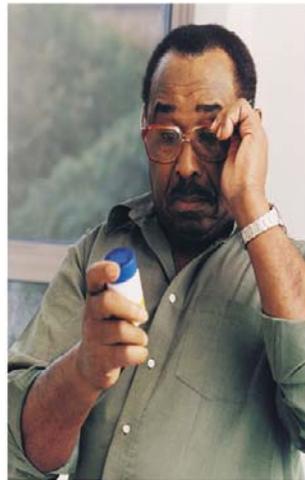
1. What is the name of my medicine?
2. Why am I taking this medicine?
3. What side effects could I have?
4. How much do I take and how often?
5. What should I do if I miss a dose or double the dose of my medicine?
6. While taking this medicine, should I avoid alcohol, driving, certain foods, drinks, medicines, vitamins, or herbals?”

“You should get the answers to these questions when you’re at the doctor’s office or pharmacy any time you begin to take something new, including over-the-counter medicine, vitamins, supplements, or even new "miracle" foods that you read and hear about. Keep in mind that there is a possibility of interactions with herbals, vitamins, and other over-the-counter products.”

# Slide 12

## Patient Medication Information

- All prescriptions should come with this information
- Some pharmacies provide large print and other languages
- When in doubt, ask for an explanation!



“All prescription medicine should come with patient medication information that contain many of the answers to these questions. If you do not understand this information, contact your pharmacist or poison center to ask any questions.”

“If you think you are having any side effects or a bad reaction to the medicine, speak to your doctor right away about your concerns.”

“Now that we have talked about the potential for interactions, let’s discuss some tips for managing your medicines.”

“Can any of you give an example of ways you keep track of what you’re taking?”

**(Let the group answer; move on with script after a few or no responses.)**

# Slide 13

## Medicine Management Tools

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- Medicine tracking tools
  - Journal
  - Calendar
  - Medicine wallet card
  - Pill reminder box

“You can also keep track of your medicines and other remedies by keeping a journal, a diary, a list, a medicine wallet card or a pill reminder box. It’s important to pick a system that works for your individual lifestyle.”

“Also ask your doctor to schedule your medicines so they are as simple to take as possible. Your pharmacist can also help with the initial organization of your medicines.”

“Whatever system you choose, remember to keep medicines out of reach and out of sight. If you live with, care for, or are visited by children or teens, make sure they can’t get into your medicines, vitamins, or herbals. Use locks and child-resistant containers for storing your medicines and keeping them out of reach and out of sight.”

# Slide 14

## Medicine Journal or Diary

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- Keep track of...
  - Questions or problems related to your medicine
  - Blood pressure
  - Blood sugar
- Take with you to:
  - Doctor's office
  - Pharmacy
  - Any healthcare visit



“You can also keep a journal or diary to record problems or questions about your medicines. Your doctor needs to know if you are feeling any bad effects from your medicine.

“Also take notes during or right after a doctor visit to make sure you remember the information later.

“If you need refills, include this information in your notes. You can also include blood sugar or blood pressure readings in this same record.”

# Slide 15

## Medicine Wallet Card

Prescription Medicines			Date began taking	How much to take and when	Do not take with	Blood type _____ Medical condition(s) _____
Name and how much medicine (example)	Color	What it is for				
Tetracycline 250 mg	White	Respiratory infection	2/8/2011	4 times a day 9 a.m., 1 p.m., 5 p.m., 9 p.m.	Antacids or dairy products	_____

Emergency Contact	
Name	_____
Home phone	_____
Work phone	_____
Cell phone	_____

Medicine Wallet Card	
Show this card to your doctor or pharmacist. To print more copies, visit <a href="http://www.ahrq.gov">www.ahrq.gov</a> and type "Your Medicine" in the search box.	
My name	_____
Contact information	_____
	_____
	_____

<input type="checkbox"/> Laxatives <input type="checkbox"/> Diet pills <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ Medicines I should not take because of bad reactions or allergies _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Glucosamine chondroitin <input type="checkbox"/> St. John's wort <input type="checkbox"/> Ginkgo biloba <input type="checkbox"/> Ginseng <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ _____ _____ _____
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EDUCATE before  
**YOU MEDICATE**  
National Council on Patient Information and Education  
[www.nah.edu/ncpie.org](http://www.nah.edu/ncpie.org)



**AHRQ**  
Agency for Healthcare  
Research and Quality  
Advancing Excellence  
in Health Care

“To make sure that medicine is always taken on schedule, some people like to track their medicines using something they can carry with them at all times. You can use a medicine wallet card like this one.”

“You can also note medical conditions, vaccinations, and allergies on this card.”

# Slide 16

## My Medicine Record

Be an Active Member of Your Health Care Team

### My Medicine Record



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Food and Drug Administration



Name (Last, First, Middle Initial):  Birth Date (mm/dd/yyyy):

	What I'm Using Rx – Brand & generic name; OTC – Name & active ingredients	What It Looks Like Color, shape, size, markings, etc.	How Much	How to Use / When to Use	Start / Stop Dates	Why I'm Using / Notes	Who Told Me to Use / How to Contact
<i>— Enter ALL prescription (Rx) medicine (include samples), over-the-counter (OTC) medicine, and dietary supplements —</i>							
EX:	XXXX/xxxxxxxx	20 mg pill; small, white, round	40 mg; use two 20 mg pills	Take orally, 2 times a day, at 8:00 am & 8:00 pm	1-15-11	Lowers blood pressure; check blood pressure once a week; blood test on 4-15-11	Dr. X (800) 555-1212
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

Enter dosage amount of medicine for entry 4.

“This is another example of a medicine tracking form that you can also use.”

# Slide 17

## Pill Reminders Can They Help?

Although pill reminder boxes are convenient, it is best not to take medicine out of their original containers.



“Keeping medicines in a pill reminder is another way to keep track of your medicines. These containers hold a full week’s supply of pills with separate sections for each day of the week and time of day. These containers are also convenient if you travel. Be careful when you use a pill box to keep doses organized.”

“Although pill reminder boxes are convenient, it is best not to take medicine out of their original containers.”

# Slide 18

## Additional Resources

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- ❑ Medicines in My Home  
[www.fda.gov/medsinmyhome](http://www.fda.gov/medsinmyhome)
- ❑ Avoiding Drug Interactions  
[www.fda.gov/downloads/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm096391.pdf](http://www.fda.gov/downloads/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm096391.pdf)
- ❑ Safe Medicine Use & Poison Prevention Tips for Older Adults and Caregivers  
[www.poisonhelp.hrsa.gov/uploads/files/resources/SafeMedicineUseTips.pdf](http://www.poisonhelp.hrsa.gov/uploads/files/resources/SafeMedicineUseTips.pdf)
- ❑ Stop, Learn, and Go: Tips for Talking with your Pharmacist  
<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/UCM163351.pdf>
- ❑ Up and Away and Out of Sight  
[www.UpandAway.org](http://www.UpandAway.org)

“These are a few additional resources about medication safety that you may find useful.”

# Play the Tic-Tac-Toe Game

- When you are done with Slide 18 of the program, begin the *Tic-Tac-Toe* game with the group. Questions and Answers are on the next slide.
- Divide the group in two teams: Team “X” and Team “O”
- Keep score by writing the “X’s” and “O’s” on a flip chart or alternative that can be viewed by participants. Encourage participants to keep track using the grid on page 12 of their Participant Guide.
- No team will receive credit for a wrong answer.
- Play the game until there is a winner or all of the questions have been asked.

1. True or False? Anything can be poisonous. **TRUE**
2. True or False? Poisonings only happen to children. **FALSE**
3. True or False? Your medicines can be affected by herbals, dietary supplements, and some foods and fruit juices. **TRUE**
4. Write one of the six questions you should ask when starting a new medicine.
  - What is the name of this medicine?**
  - Why am I taking this medicine?**
  - What side effects could I have?**
  - How much and how often do I take this?**
  - What should I do if I miss a dose or double the dose of my medicine?**
  - While taking this medicine, should I avoid alcohol, certain foods, drinks, medicines, vitamins, or herbals?**
5. True or False? It is important to discuss over-the-counter medicines that you take with a pharmacist or doctor before you start taking a new prescription medicine. **TRUE**
6. True or False? You can call your poison center at 1-800-222-1222 if you have an emergency with your medicines. **TRUE**
7. True or False? Herbals and other supplements can interact with medicines. **TRUE**
8. List one way to keep track of medicine.
  - List**
  - Journal**
  - Calendar**
  - Medicine Wallet Card**
  - Pill Box – (Remind participants that although pill reminder boxes are convenient, it is best not to take medicine out of their original containers.)**
9. List a resource for asking questions about your medicine.
  - Doctor**
  - Nurse**
  - Pharmacist**
  - A poison center reached by calling Poison Help 1-800-222-1222**

# Slide 19

## Poison Help 1-800-222-1222

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- Call your poison center if you have taken too much of your medicine or the incorrect medicine
- Call if you need information
- Doctors and hospitals also call their local poison center

“Medicines can be poison when taken the wrong way. Poison centers can help with this. Call your poison center if you feel that you may have taken too much of your medicine or the incorrect medicine.”

“Poison center services are not just for emergencies; you can also call for information.”

“Poison centers also answers calls from hospitals, emergency rooms, and doctor offices. All are welcome to call.”

# Slide 20

## Poison Help 1-800-222-1222

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- ❑ One national number that connects you to your local poison center
- ❑ Trained poison experts available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- ❑ Services available in over 160 languages and for the hearing impaired
- ❑ Calls are free and confidential

“Calling Poison Help 1-800-222-1222 works from anywhere in the U.S. Services are available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You will be connected with a trained medical professional who can offer free expert advice in over 160 languages. The call is free and information is kept confidential.”

# Slide 21

## Poison Help or 911?

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Call 1-800-222-1222 if person:

- Takes wrong medicine
- Takes too much medicine
- Inhales a poison (gas)
- Spills poison on self
- Gets poison in eye
- Eats or drinks something that is not food

Call 911 if person:

- Is not breathing
- Is having seizures
- Won't wake up
- Has collapsed

“If someone takes the wrong medicine or too much medicine, call the Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222. You will be connected to your local poison center. You should also call Poison Help if someone breathes a poison, spills poison on themselves, gets poison in their eye, or eats or drinks something that is not food.”

“However, if someone is not breathing, having seizures, won't wake up or has collapsed, even as the result of a poisoning, call 911 immediately.”

# Slide 22

## Examples of When to Call Your Local Poison Center

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- A child swallows medicine that belongs to someone else
- You take a double dose of your medicine by mistake
- You take someone else's medicine by mistake

“Feel free to call a poison center anytime. These are just a few examples of when you should call.”

- “My three-year old grandson is visiting and got into my blood pressure medicine. When we found him, he had 2 pills in his mouth, and pills were on the floor and some were still in the container. What should we do?”
- “I started feeling funny so I read my pain medicine bottle and realized that I took twice as much pain medication as I was supposed to. What should I do?”
- “My spouse is on anti-anxiety medication and I took the pills by mistake. What should I do?”

# Slide 23

## Prevent Medicine Poisoning

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- ❑ Never sell or share your prescription medicines
- ❑ Follow directions on medicine bottle
- ❑ Turn on light
- ❑ Wear glasses if needed
- ❑ Keep pain pills and other medications locked, out of reach, and out of sight

“We can prevent medicine poisoning. Just practice a few simple tips. Remember that your prescription medicines are only for you. When taking any medicine, read the label and follow the directions. Make sure that you can see well by turning on the light and wearing glasses if you need them. Other people may be interested in your medicine, especially pain medicines. Keep medications out of reach, out of sight and locked away.

“Call your poison center if you think you or someone else may be poisoned.”

# Slide 24

## Information the Poison Center Needs from You

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- ❑ Information from medicine bottle or container
- ❑ Age and weight of person
- ❑ Health history (for example, medicines the person may be taking)
- ❑ Exact name and strength of medicine
- ❑ How much was taken
- ❑ When everything happened

“When you call your poison center, it would be helpful to have the medicine bottle, container or object that may be causing the poisoning.

“The specialist who handles your call will need this to help determine the appropriate treatment. The Specialist may also need to know the following information: age of victim, weight of victim, health history (any allergies, recent illness, other medications person may be taking), information about what was taken, exact name and strength of medication, amount of product taken, and how long ago everything happened.”

# Slide 25



“The specialist from your poison center will ask for your name, phone number and zip code, and relationship to victim. It may be helpful to provide this information. If you are uncomfortable, you do not have to give your name; but giving the poison center your phone number will enable them to call you back and check on your situation should your call become disconnected. All information given to your poison center is kept confidential.”

# Slide 26

## Take Your Medicines Safely



**POISON  
Help**  
1-800-222-1222



*Thank You*

“In order to be the best wife, husband, mother, father, friend, or grandparent, it’s really up to you to take care of yourself. That includes taking your medicines safely. Thanks for your interest in this program. Do you have any questions?”

“Again, please call your poison center if you take too much medicine or the wrong medicine. Ask your doctor or pharmacist any questions that you may have about your medicines. And most importantly, do not stop or change medicine that you are currently taking without consulting your doctor.”

# Congratulations!

**You have now been trained to deliver the  
*Taking Your Medicines Safely*  
Community Education Program**

**Thank you for your interest.**

**HRSA appreciates the time and effort that you have  
contributed to this program!**

**Please close this PowerPoint presentation and proceed  
to the **MEDICINE SAFETY REVIEW QUIZ** to review what  
you have learned.**