

# CHENANGO COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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## HEALTH EDUCATION DIVISION

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## For The Health of It

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### Is Your Medicine Cabinet Safe?

Many people take prescription medications and use them properly under the care of their physician. However, there has been a steady increase in the nonmedical misuse of many types of medications and an increase in accidental overdoses in children and adults. Some people store their medications and over-the-counter medications in the medicine cabinet. This can become a problem because children, visitors, the elderly, and teenagers can find these medications.

Every year, more than 60,000 young children go to the emergency room because they got into someone else's medicine. The number of accidental overdoses in children has increased by 20 percent. Parents and caregivers should follow every precaution to properly store these items safely but also know what to do in case of an emergency. The Poison Control number at 1-800-222-1212 should be available at home and stored on cell phones in case it is needed. Family, visitors, and babysitters should be aware of emergency numbers.

One of the most shocking facts about the misuse of prescription drugs has been the increase in painkiller abuse, which can often lead to heroin use. Among persons ages 12 or older who used pain relievers nonmedically in the past year, an estimated 70% obtained them from a friend or relative. Nonmedical use of certain prescription drugs can lead to addiction because when they can no longer get the pills, some turn to heroin. Heroin is easier to obtain and cheap to buy. Heroin is very addictive and can hook the user *after just one try*. Heroin abuse has doubled from 2007 to 2012 and is on the rise in our County.

What can you do?

- Be aware of the medications in your home. Store them in a safe place out of reach and out of sight of children. Secure bottles after use. Take medications as directed.
- Properly dispose of unused or expired medications by taking them to a drop-off site such as your local police department, local sheriff's office or mixing them with used cat litter, coffee grounds or sawdust with water and put them in a sealed container and place in the garbage. Flushing them down the toilet is not a recommended means of disposal.
- Teach your teens and young children to respect medicines and teach them of the dangers of misuse. Teach them that use of certain prescription drugs can lead to illness, addiction or even death.
- Be aware of warning signs of misuse: such as irritability, unexplained changes in behavior, frequent requests for money, frequent nasal infections, withdrawal from normal activities, or changes in friends.
- In the case of an emergency, call 911. If you suspect your child has ingested a medication you can also call the poison center.
- Talk with older adults in your family to see if they have unused medications in their homes. It is important to get rid of things that are old or a danger to others.

To read more about prescription drug abuse go to

[www.combatheroin.ny.gov](http://www.combatheroin.ny.gov)

To read more about proper disposal go to [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

The Upstate poison center's website is [www.upstatepoison.org](http://www.upstatepoison.org)

Persons with questions or requiring additional information may contact the  
Chenango County Health Department at **(607) 337-1660**.

*Promoting and protecting health, safety, and the quality of life in Chenango County*