

Keeping Babies and Preschoolers Safe from Addictive, Toxic Substances

America is in the midst of an addiction epidemic, and dangerous drugs, including opioids, are more prevalent than ever before. This crisis has contributed to a rise in the number of children who have experienced serious consequences from coming in contact with toxic, addictive substances, ranging from illicit drugs to food and drink items that may be relatively harmless to adults.

As a policymaker, you have both the responsibility and leverage to safeguard young children from the harms of exposure to addictive, toxic substances. Here's what you can do:

Safeguard Children from All Addictive Substances

- Get the facts out through population-wide public awareness campaigns targeted to parents, other caregivers, educators, and health care professionals.
- Improve child-resistant packaging requirements for medications and for nicotine, alcohol and marijuana products.
- Require legal addictive products, including prescription medications, nicotine, and marijuana to be packaged in small, nonfatal doses.
- Require warnings on product labels or in packaging inserts to be included with all addictive products sold by retailers, including vape shops that sell nicotine products, food and beverage markets that sell alcohol or caffeinated energy drinks, pharmacies that dispense controlled prescription medications, and marijuana dispensaries that sell marijuana edibles.
- Fund research on ways to prevent childhood poisoning.
- Fund improvements in data collection and surveillance techniques.
- Assure legal immunity for parents who report a child for exposure to an illegal substance to ensure honest and accurate reporting by parents.

Nicotine Products

The popularity of non-cigarette nicotine products, such as electronic cigarettes, has contributed to a significant rise in unintentional nicotine exposures in young children.

- **Ban flavoring in all nicotine products:** Flavored nicotine products are highly appealing to children. The federal government banned the sale of flavored cigarettes other than menthol, and policymakers should do the same for all products that contain tobacco or nicotine.
- **Ensure that liquid nicotine for e-cigarettes and other vaping products is sold in child-resistant packaging and in small, nonfatal doses:** Liquid nicotine for vaping products has led to the most severe nicotine-related childhood poisonings cases. What makes liquid nicotine so dangerous is that there is a much higher nicotine concentration in the liquid compared to other nicotine products. To prevent serious poisonings, standards for all liquid nicotine manufacturers should be set in which these products are only permitted to contain small amounts of liquid nicotine per container, with amounts that would not be lethal if a young child accidentally ingested all the liquid in the container.

Caffeine Products

Caffeine is now found in everything from soft drinks to potato chips, candy bars and specialty water, making it difficult to monitor caffeine intake and exposure in young children. Compared to adults, children are at increased risk of health problems from ingesting caffeine.

- **Require caffeine doses be listed on the label of all products that contain caffeine:** Manufacturers of caffeinated food products or dietary supplements are not currently required to list on the label the amount of caffeine contained in the product. All products and supplements with caffeine should be required to state the amount of caffeine in the product, and do so in a manner that would be understandable to parents.
- **Ban the sale of pure powdered caffeine:** Pure powdered caffeine is extremely lethal for young children, with estimates of one teaspoon of powdered caffeine equivalent to 28 cups of coffee.
- **Increase funding for research on caffeine's effects on young people and formulate comprehensive standards for the amount of caffeine a person can consume safely:** The U.S. Food and Drug Administration currently has no guidelines on caffeine consumption for children. Policymakers should publish official guidelines on the amount of caffeine that children of all ages can consume safely per day.

Marijuana Products

Marijuana products are becoming increasingly accessible to young children due to the growing trend toward marijuana legalization and the growing popularity of marijuana edibles. Marijuana edibles often are indistinguishable from non-marijuana food products, have appealing packaging, and are not always required to be sold in child-resistant packaging.

- **Ban marijuana edibles that look like regular food products:** Marijuana edibles should not resemble food products that appeal to children, such as gummy bears, lollipops, other candy, chocolate, or brownies.
- **Require opaque packaging for marijuana edibles:** Edibles look very similar to comparable food products, and opaque packaging can help prevent young children from being able to see, and be attracted to, the marijuana edible inside the package.
- **Ensure that manufacturers of marijuana products follow the child-resistant packaging laws in accordance with the Poison Preventing Packaging Act (PPPA) of 1970:** All states should adopt regulations surrounding the packaging requirements set under the PPPA.
- **Implement re-sealable child-resistant packaging laws for marijuana edibles:** Ensuring the package is both re-sealable and child-resistant can prevent children from ingesting a marijuana product once it has been opened.

For additional research findings and further guidance on what policymakers can do to protect children from the harms of substance use and addiction, visit www.centeronaddiction.org and www.aapcc.org.

