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Accidentally dropped in the eye: 1200 medicine mishaps

A review of calls to the NSW Poisons Information Centre found that between 2004 and 2011 there were nearly 1300 cases of people accidentally dropping a pharmaceutical product in their eye – medicines that were not intended to be used in the eye.

Jared Brown, senior poisons specialist at the NSW Poisons Information Centre, says that the main products involved were a mixture of prescription and over-the-counter steroids, antiseptics, antifungals, antibacterials, ear wax removal, ear drying and nasal decongestant products. The study features in *Australian Prescriber*.

The 1290 cases of accidental administration to the eye compare with around 900 people who accidentally put superglue in their eyes, during the same time period. More than 75% of the 1290 cases were adults. 342 people needed medical attention and 3 had corneal ulceration.

“Products looking similar, and it appears mistaken identity is the most common cause of errors,” says Mr Brown.

“Further research is needed into product packaging and labelling to help stop these preventable errors.”

Suggestions for preventing use of the wrong medicines in the eye include:

- keep the drops in the original box
- separate the drops – store different types of drops in separate locations
- discard leftover drops
- examine the product closely before using it.
- warnings at the time of prescribing, dispensing or sale could also help remind people about the potential dangers of mixing up medicines.

The Poisons Information Centre can be reached on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia – 24 hours a day – for information and advice on the treatment of poisoning, bites and stings.

The Poisons Information Centre is located at the Children’s Hospital at Westmead.

The Children’s Hospital at Westmead is the highly respected, largest paediatric centre in NSW, providing excellent care for children from NSW, Australia and across

the Pacific Rim. It forms part of the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (Randwick and Westmead).

Established in 1880, The Children's Hospital at Westmead is a public Hospital and registered charity with 3,000 staff working in 150 departments. 70,000 sick children and their families are cared for each year in a family-focused, healing environment.

Funded by the NSW Government, The Children's Hospital at Westmead provides significant extra services aided by the generosity of individual and corporate donors. For more information visit www.chw.edu.au

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