

M.D. drug advice for kids with fever can be dangerous

When a child has a temperature, it can be frightening for parents. They want to get the fever down as quickly as possible without hurting the child. But when they ask their medical doctor for advice, they're often told to alternate two over-the-counter drugs: ibuprofen and acetaminophen.

But that can be dangerous, according to Dr. Clara E. Mayoral and her colleagues at Winthrop University Hospital in Mineola, New York, who reported their research findings in the May 2000 issue of *Pediatrics*.

The researchers asked 161 pediatricians how they normally treat children's fevers. Half said they recommend giving both ibuprofen and acetaminophen in alternating doses.

However, the researchers stated, "There is presently no scientific evidence that this combination is safe or achieves faster antipyresis than either agent alone." However, they pointed out, "There is evidence that the improper use of these agents may cause harm."

The drugs are known to cause upset stomachs if taken in high amounts and, in the case of an accidental overdose, they have resulted in liver failure and death.

Shockingly, 29% of the doctors surveyed cited American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations as the basis for fever management -- **yet, no such policy or recommendations exist!**

Despite the clear evidence that these drugs should not be routinely prescribed or recommended, doctors often succumb to react to parents "fever phobia," Dr. Mayoral said, noting that younger, less-experienced doctors were more likely to advise alternating the drugs.

"Parents need to understand that fever is not necessarily a bad thing," stated Mayoral in a Reuters interview. "It's the body's response to infection. Treating the fever does not treat the underlying cause."

SOURCE: "Alternating Antipyretics: Is This an Alternative?" *Pediatrics*, May 2000.