



Prevent Errors in Your Child's Care

Your child's health and safety are important to doctors, nurses, and other caregivers. You can make a difference in your child's care by asking the right questions and being actively involved. This brochure has tips and answers to questions to prevent errors in your child's care.

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The Joint Commission is the largest health care accrediting body in the United States that promotes quality and safety.

Helping health care organizations help patients

What can you do to prepare for your child's visit to the doctor's office or hospital?

It's helpful to write down the following information:

- Your child's medical history. Include vaccinations, allergies, current health problems, and the dates of any surgeries and hospital visits.
- A list of your child's medicines. Include prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbs. Include the amounts your child takes.
- Questions you have about your child's health.

Share this information with your child's doctor and other caregivers.

What should you ask the doctor?

Find out about all the tests and treatments for your child's illness or injury. Ask how a treatment will help your child. Understand that more tests or treatments are not always better for your child.

What if you do not understand what the doctor is saying?

Tell the doctor you do not understand. Ask more questions. By asking questions you are helping the doctor understand what you need. Tell the doctor if you need someone who speaks your language.

How can you help prevent your child from getting an infection?

Remind caregivers to wash or clean their hands before touching your child. Handwashing helps prevent infection. Remind caregivers to wear clean gloves when they do tasks such as taking blood, touching wounds or examining your child's private parts.



Taking medicine safely

What can you do to make sure it is safe for your child to take a new medicine?

Tell the doctor or nurse your child's current weight or ask them to weigh your child (in kilograms). Medicines for children are based on weight. Ask the following questions:

- Why does your child need a new medicine? How will it help?
- What are the names of the medicine?
- Is there written information about the medicine?
- What does the medicine look like? Is it a liquid or a pill? What color is the medicine?
- What are the instructions for taking the medicine? Repeat the instructions back to the caregiver.
- What are the side effects?

Remind the doctor or caregiver about your child's allergies and reactions to any medicines in the past. Tell the doctor or caregiver if you do not understand any information about the medicine. When you get the medicine, check the label for your child's name and the correct medicine name and strength.

Can you cut or crush pills or put them in food if your child has trouble swallowing them?

Ask the doctor or pharmacist. As an example, time-release medicines should not be cut or crushed. Ask if the medicine comes in a liquid or can be given another way.

What should you do if your child has accidentally taken a medicine or taken too much medicine?

Immediately call your local poison control center or your doctor. Keep these phone numbers handy.



Having a medical or laboratory test

What are medical and laboratory tests?

Medical tests include X-rays, MRIs, and CT scans. Lab tests include blood tests and urine samples.

What should you ask about medical and lab tests?

Ask why your child needs a test. Find out which test will be done and what your child should be prepared for during the test. Find out if you can be with your child during the test.

Are there any risks with medical or lab tests?

X-rays and CT scans use radiation. Some patients have received too much radiation. MRIs use strong magnets. Metal objects accidentally pulled into the MRI machine have injured some patients. Ask staff what has been done to make sure your child is safe during the test.

What should you do if your child is having a blood test or other lab test?

Ask to see the label on the container that your child's sample is put into. The label should have your child's name and birth date or another piece of information. See that the container is immediately sealed.

What should you do if your child is having an X-ray, MRI or CT scan?

Ask if your child will be given a contrast agent. This is a liquid that makes organs and blood vessels easy to see on X-rays and other tests. Tell staff if your child has had problems with contrast agents before. Immediately tell staff if your child begins to itch or have trouble breathing after getting a contrast agent.



Going to the hospital

What is one of the first things you should do to help prevent errors in the hospital?

Check your child's identification band. Make sure the information on the band is correct. Make sure caregivers check the band and ask your child's name before giving any medicine, test or treatment. Caregivers should also ask for your child's birth date or another piece of information.

Can you stay with your child overnight at the hospital?

Check with the hospital. Most hospitals will let a parent stay overnight. It is important that you or someone you trust be with your child whenever possible to be their advocate.

Your child needs to get an IV. What is this?

An IV is an intravenous medicine that goes into the vein. Ask regularly when the IV can be removed. The area where it is placed can become infected.

Here are some tips to help you while your child is in the hospital:

- Write down information. As an example, write down medicine names and amounts.
- Immediately tell caregivers if your child is in pain. They should check your child regularly for pain.
- Your child may be moved to another floor or department. Check that your child gets the correct medicines and treatments after the move. Talk to caregivers if you think there is any confusion.
- Ask visitors who are ill to call instead or come back when they are well. Your child can easily catch illnesses.
- All staff should wear an identification badge. Ask to see a badge if you can't see it.



Having a safe operation

What can you do to help keep your child safe before going to the hospital?

Ask that any sedatives (sleep medicines) be given at the hospital and not at home before coming to the hospital. Talk to the surgeon and others who will operate on your child. Ask how much experience they have performing the operation. It is important that you are confident in the ability of the people who will operate on your child.

What can you do to help keep your child safe before the operation?

Talk to the surgeon about the part of your child's body that will be operated on. Ask the surgeon to mark the part to be operated on while you are in the room. This will make sure it is the correct part. Make sure the surgeon marks only the correct part and nowhere else. Ask if you can stay with your child until the sedatives (sleep medicines) begin working and your child falls asleep.

What can you do to help keep your child safe after the operation?

Ask if pediatric specialists will be caring for your child in the recovery area.

What can you do to make sure your child is safe after leaving the hospital?

Ask about the care your child will need at home. Get written instructions. Get the names and phone numbers of people to call if you have questions or in case of an emergency.

Symptoms that mean you need to take your child to the doctor or hospital immediately:

- A stiff neck
- Fever with a skin rash
- Fever over 100.4 degrees (in child 3 months or younger)
- Burns that are larger than the palm of your child's hand, or are deep, discolored, or caused by a chemical
- A head injury that causes your child to black out, vomit, or have a headache or be confused. Vomiting, headache, or confusion can develop later.
- Severe stomach pain or stomach that is swollen or tender to touch
- Blood in stool. This could be red or black, tarry looking stools.
- When your instinct tells you something is wrong with your child's health