



**Office of the Child Advocate  
Connecticut Child Fatality Review Panel**

**Public Health Alert:  
When Is Benadryl Safe To Use With Children?**

**CAREGIVERS SHOULD NEVER USE BENADRYL OR OTHER ANTIHISTAMINES IN ORDER TO GET THEIR INFANTS TO BE QUIET OR TO SLEEP.**

**ANTIHISTAMINES LIKE BENADRYL SHOULD ONLY BE USED WHEN PRESCRIBED BY A LICENSED MEDICAL PROVIDER.**

**BENADRYL IS FOR THE TREATMENT OF MEDICAL CONDITIONS LIKE ALLERGIC REACTIONS, SEASONAL ALLERGIES OR ITCHING FROM SKIN CONDITIONS LIKE POISON IVY OR ECZEMA.**

**What is Diphenhydramine?**

Diphenhydramine is used to treat medical problems like allergies, hay fever, the common cold and itching from skin conditions like eczema and poison ivy. Symptoms from these medical conditions include rash, itching, watery eyes, itchy eyes/nose/throat, cough, runny nose, sneezing and hives. It is also used to prevent and treat nausea, vomiting and dizziness caused by motion sickness. Since its introduction in 1946, Diphenhydramine has been marketed under various trade names, like Benadryl.<sup>1</sup>

**Some Parents Use Diphenhydramine to Help a Baby Sleep**

An online poll done in 2011 by the Today show and Parenting magazine found that of more than 26,000 mothers who responded, one in five admitted to giving their children medicine such as Benadryl or Dramamine to get through a big event, like a long car ride or plane trip. One in 12 mothers responded that they regularly dosed their children with sleep-inducing medication, like Benadryl or Dramamine, just to get some peace and quiet on a normal night.

**Are there similar medications? And what are the side effects?**

Other common antihistamines are chlorpheniramine (Chlortrimeton), hydroxyzine (Atarax) and meclizine (Dramamine). All antihistamines can have significant side effects, such as central nervous system excitation, hallucinations, seizures and cardiac dysrhythmias. Diphenhydramine can be found in combination with other medications like Tylenol, ibuprofen and aspirin in medicines with these brand names:

Benadryl	Sominex
Nytol	Tylenol PM

<sup>1</sup> (<http://www.webmd.com/drugs/2/drug-5680/benadryl-oral/details>)

### **Diphenhydramine/antihistamine Overdoses**

Just 3 years after it became available, the first death due to toxic effects of diphenhydramine was reported in 1949. Recently there have been both published medical reports of fatal diphenhydramine toxicity in infants in multiple medical journals. **Additionally, there have been at least 4 deaths in Connecticut of infants and toddlers over the past year due to toxicity from Benadryl or other antihistamines like Chlorpheniramine (Chlortrimeton).**

### **Only use antihistamines on the advice of a pediatrician, and never to make a baby sleep**

The use of antihistamines for infants should only be done with a prescription from a licensed medical provider to treat diseases that cause itching in infants, like eczema or allergic reactions. **Parents should not give antihistamines like Benadryl to help a baby sleep** due to the likelihood of adverse reactions like seizures and cardiac arrhythmias which can be fatal.

**THE DANGEROUS PRACTICE OF CAREGIVERS GIVING ANTIHISTAMINES LIKE BENADRYL TO INFANTS TO HELP THEM SLEEP AT NIGHT OR KEEP THEM QUIET WHILE TRAVELING ON AN AIRPLANE OR IN THE CAR IS LIKELY VERY COMMON.**

**CAREGIVERS SHOULD CONSULT WITH A LICENSED MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL PRIOR TO GIVING ANTIHISTAMINES TO A BABY.**

**THESE MEDICATIONS SHOULD NOT BE USED TO HELP AN INFANT SLEEP.**

(1, 2)

#### References

1. Baker AM, Johnson DG, Levisky JA, Hearn WL, Moore KA, Levine B, et al. Fatal diphenhydramine intoxication in infants. Journal of forensic sciences. 2003;48(2):425-8.
2. Nine JS, Rund CR. Fatality from diphenhydramine monointoxication: a case report and review of the infant, pediatric, and adult literature. Am J Forensic Med Pathol. 2006;27(1):36-41.
3. <http://www.today.com/parents/medicating-your-kids-peace-quiet-it-ever-ok-849460>