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**Oklahoma Poison Center Reports Rise in Adolescent Self-Harm Ingestions and How Communities Can Help**

Oklahoma City – In recent months, the Oklahoma Poison Center has observed a concerning increase in cases of intentional self-harm ingestions among adolescents. As a leading authority in poison treatment, education, and prevention, we are committed to raising awareness and offering practical strategies to help prevent these tragic incidents.

**A Disturbing Trend**

Our data indicates a sharp rise in the number of adolescents engaging in self-harm through ingestion of toxic substances. This alarming trend underscores the urgent need for community intervention and awareness. Intentional self-harm is a serious issue that requires a multi-faceted approach to prevention and intervention. Suicide data reported by the National Poison Data System (NPDS), our national poison association exposure case database, has seen a 77% increase in poison self-harm and suspected suicide cases from 2000-2022. We want to encourage all parents and teachers to continue to have conversations about medication safety and self-harm in hopes this trend decreases. Take threats and discussions about self-harm seriously.

Since May of 2021, there have been a total of 4,054 intentional self-harm ingestions reported to the Oklahoma Poison Center in adolescents aged 12-18 years. Eighty percent of the intentional self-harm ingestions were in female patients. Tragically 3 of these ingestions resulted in the adolescent’s death. While the types of medication taken varied, many included over the counter (OTC) medications such as aspirin, diphenhydramine, ibuprofen, and acetaminophen, which are available without a prescription. These medicines are common in most households, and the accessibility can make them easy to take in large amounts. Kristie Edelen, Managing Director of the Oklahoma Poison Center, says “Keep all medications and bulk over-the-counter pain relievers locked up and have conversations with your adolescents on how to properly take medications.”

**Strategies to Prevent Self-Harm Ingestions**

To address this critical issue, we recommend the following strategies for parents, caregivers, educators, and community leaders:

1. **Enhance Awareness and Education**:
	* **Communicate Openly**: Foster open lines of communication with adolescents. Create a safe environment where they feel comfortable discussing their feelings and struggles.
	* **Educational Programs**: Implement school and community-based programs to educate adolescents about mental health, coping mechanisms, and the dangers of self-harm.
2. **Secure Hazardous Substances**:
	* **Home Safety**: Ensure that all medications, household chemicals, and toxic substances are stored securely and out of reach of children and adolescents.
	* **Monitor Access**: Regularly review and secure potential hazards in the home environment to reduce opportunities for self-harm.
3. **Promote Mental Health Resources**:
	* **Access to Support**: Encourage adolescents to seek professional help if they are experiencing mental health challenges. Make sure they are aware of available counseling services and crisis support.
	* **Community Resources**: Support local mental health organizations and initiatives that provide resources and counseling for at-risk youth.
4. **Engage in Early Intervention**:
	* **Recognize Warning Signs**: Be vigilant for signs of distress or behavioral changes in adolescents, such as withdrawal, drastic mood swings, or expressions of self-harm.
	* **Act Promptly**: If you suspect that an adolescent is at risk, seek help immediately from mental health professionals or contact Oklahoma’s 988 Mental Health Lifeline for guidance.
5. **Foster a Supportive Environment**:
	* **Community Involvement**: Collaborate with local organizations, schools, and healthcare providers to create a network of support for adolescents and their families.
	* **Positive Reinforcement**: Encourage activities that promote self-esteem and emotional resilience, such as sports, arts, and community service.

If you are struggling or in crisis, contact Oklahoma’s 988 Mental Health Lifeline. 988 is a direct, three-digit lifeline that connects you with trained behavioral health professionals that can help people experiencing suicidal thoughts, substance use, or a mental health crisis. Help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by texting 988 to access a text chat option or by going to 988oklahoma.com.

**Our Commitment**

The Oklahoma Poison Center remains dedicated to providing expert guidance and support to families and communities. For immediate assistance or if you have concerns about a potential poisoning or self-harm incident, please contact our Poison Helpline at (800) 222-1222. Together, we can take proactive steps to safeguard the well-being of our adolescents and foster a healthier community. Pharmacists and registered nurses at the Oklahoma Poison Center are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Please do not email the poison center or members of the poison center staff, as poisoning emergencies are not handled through email.

**About Oklahoma Poison Center**

Oklahoma Poison Center is dedicated to providing expert advice and support in cases of poisoning and exposure to harmful substances. Our mission is to prevent poisonings and reduce their impact through education, prevention, and providing emergency treatment recommendations. The Oklahoma Poison Center is a program of the University of Oklahoma College of Pharmacy.

**The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences**

The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences is one of the nation’s few academic health centers with all health professions colleges — Allied Health, Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Public Health, Graduate Studies and School of Community Medicine. OU Health Sciences serves approximately 4,000 students in more than 70 undergraduate and graduate degree programs on campuses in Oklahoma City and Tulsa and is the academic and research partner of OU Health, the state’s only comprehensive academic healthcare system. OU Health Sciences is ranked 129 out of over 2,849 institutions in funding received from the National Institutes of Health, according to the Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research. For more information, visit ouhsc.edu.