



Know! To Beware of the Benadryl Challenge

There's a dangerous new TikTok game that educators and parents should know about—the Benadryl Challenge. The idea is to take as many Benadryl tablets as necessary to hallucinate or “trip out,” while of course capturing it all on one's cellphone to then share with others. A 15-year-old Oklahoma girl died last month attempting this challenge, and three more Texas teens ended up in the hospital.

The Benadryl Challenge Can Be Harmful

Benadryl is an over-the-counter medicine used to treat seasonal and other allergies and is a product many families have on hand for the occasional bug bite or accidental contact with poison ivy. Because it is so commonly used and does not call for a prescription, young people may have a false sense of security when taking it.

In an interview with Forbes, David Juurlink, MD, head of the division of clinical pharmacology and toxicology at the University of Toronto in Canada, said that when taken at the proper dosage, Benadryl is mostly safe, though it tends to cause drowsiness. He warns however not to underestimate the dangers of this drug when taken inappropriately or at high doses.

Overdose symptoms in young people and adults include:

- Involuntary movements
- Blurred vision, dry eyes and dry mouth
- Inability to sweat and pass urine
- Restlessness and agitation

- Nervousness and anxiety
- Confusion
- Hallucinations
- Heart arrhythmia
- Trouble breathing
- Seizure
- Coma
- Death

How You Can Help Your Students

What is an educator to do? By reading this tip, you are already taking a step in the right direction by becoming aware. But you must also be aware that as this Internet challenge fades out, another is sure to follow, which is why it is so important to talk with students about the health and safety risks of this and other online challenges.

Here are some points to keep in mind as you do:

- Don't assume certain students won't try it: Remember, a teen's brain is not fully developed. Impulsivity, peer pressure, and competitive desire to one-up a peer are all powerful influencers.
- State (and restate) the obvious: While taking medicine for the "fun of it" seems unfathomable to you, make no assumptions when it comes to your students' safety. Additionally, make sure they know that even over-the-counter medications can have powerful and dangerous side effects.
- Prompt critical thinking: Ask your students, "What do you think could happen if you do this?" In the face of such a challenge, help students learn to step back for a moment and apply basic logic and reason before making a decision that could impact his/her health and safety, as well as their parent's trust.
- Keep it positive: Though it's tempting to focus solely on the dangerous consequences, remember that youth are hard-wired to defend against negative messages or scare tactics. It is important to educate them on the risk; however, you must also emphasize what they should do, like resisting peer pressure, making healthy decisions for themselves, and never encouraging others to put themselves at risk.

You can also urge parents to lock up their medicines, both prescription and over-the-counter. Benadryl is not a difficult drug for youth to get their hands on, however, this will eliminate the number one location young people access medications for recreational use—the family medicine cabinet.

TikTok has reportedly removed all content relating to the Benadryl Challenge. But, it would be naive however to think that is where it ends, or to think we will ever keep up with all the latest Internet trends, dangerous or not. What we can do is talk to young people and teach them to think logically and critically before the next risky challenge presents itself.

Sources

[Toni Birdsong. McAfee Blog Central: Digital Dares: Dumb Kids with Smart Phones, September 23, 2014.](#)

[Medical News Today: Benadryl \(diphenhydramine\). May 2019.](#)

[Victoria Forster, Forbes: Teen Dies After Doing TikTok 'Benadryl Challenge' As Doctors Warn Of Dangers. Sept. 2020.](#)

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