

Parents' Use of Benzocaine for Oral Pain in Young Children

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Background: In 2011 and 2012, the United States Food and Drug Administration issued safety announcements advising against the use of over-the-counter benzocaine in children younger than two years of age due to the risk of methemoglobinemia. Anecdotal evidence suggests that parents of young children continue to use benzocaine to manage teething pain in young children despite this safety announcement. The purpose of this study is to characterize parents' use of benzocaine in young children.

Methods: A self-administered paper survey of 400 English-speaking parents of children, aged six to 72 months, was conducted at university-based pediatric medical and dental clinics in Seattle, Washington, from April 4, 2013 to October 16, 2013. The survey asked about oral pain experienced by the children, benzocaine use, parents' perception of its effectiveness, receipt of advice to use or avoid benzocaine, and family demographics. Logistic regression was used to determine association with parents' benzocaine use.

Results: Three hundred seventy-eight parents completed the survey. Median child age was 41 months. Overall, ninety-two (44.2%) parents, including 26 (36.1%) parents of children, aged six to 23 months, reported administering benzocaine to their child for teething pain. Sixty-eight (61.3%) parents of children, aged six to 23 months, received advice to use benzocaine and 31 (27.4%) were advised against its use. Receipt of advice to use benzocaine was significantly associated with parents' use of it for oral pain in their young child. For parents of children, aged six to 23 months, the odds of using benzocaine for teething pain was 14.4 times higher among those who received advice to use it than among those who did not receive this advice (95% CI = 1.7-117.8).

Conclusions: More than one-third of parents reported using benzocaine to manage teething pain in their child younger than two years of age. Parents may lack awareness of the Food and Drug Administration's recommendation against the use of over-the-counter topical benzocaine to manage oral pain in children younger than two years of age.

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