

A five-minute training Series for Pest Management Professionals.**Over the Counter Medications**

This is the season for flu, cold, and allergies. The symptoms that accompany these illnesses can be greatly relieved by over the counter medications. Depending on the severity; the watery eyes, runny nose, coughing, and general achy feeling, can incapacitate some people to the point that they must stay home to recover. When our symptoms are mild enough to allow us to work, many of us use over-the-counter medications to alleviate the discomfort and allow us to make it through the workday.

Typical "cold medications" are antihistamines, decongestants, pain relievers or a combination of all three. Unfortunately, the side effects of these drugs can be dangerous depending on the use and dosage. Many non-prescription drugs cause drowsiness, inattentiveness, or impair one's ability to concentrate or make sound decisions. These medications can slow your reflexes and affect your ability to drive a vehicle or operate other machinery.

**If you take over-the-counter medications to help relieve the symptoms of a seasonal illness, keep these rules in mind:**

- Follow the recommended dosage. Twice the dosage won't make you feel twice as good but can double the side effects such as dizziness, excitability, or drowsiness.
- Don't use combination medicines. Assess your illness and the symptoms you need to treat. Decide if you need a decongestant, a pain reliever, or an antihistamine. Avoid multi-drug products if you only have one symptom to control.
- Don't mix over-the-counter medications or use in conjunction with prescription drugs. The effects of mixing different medications can be severe and are often unpredictable. Individuals who are already on prescription medication should check with their doctor or pharmacist before taking over-the-counter medications.
- Read and understand the label before dosing. Most over-the-counter medicines have warnings about such things as operating machinery, driving, and drinking alcohol when taking the medication. In addition, the label clearly states activities to avoid and maximum dosing in a 24 hour time period.
- If possible, find a medication that works and stick with it. Don't change remedies every few days. Talk to a pharmacist if you are uncertain about the symptoms a medication is designed to control. If you need to try something different, try to do so when you are done working for the day and will have the evening to stay home in a controlled environment.

Don't underestimate the effects that over-the-counter medications can have on your ability to perform your work safely. Consult your physician if your symptoms don't improve in a week or if they get progressively worse. Stay well rested and wash your hands often for your best defense.