Intentional Benadryl Misuse

What is the "Benadryl Challenge?"

Benadryl (diphenhydramine HCL) is an over-the-counter antihistamine commonly used to help relieve allergy symptoms like sneezing, itching, a runny nose, and watery eyes. Beginning in 2020, an internet "challenge" started spreading on social media. It appeared most often on TikTok, where many teens saw it, but it likely circulated on other platforms as well. The challenge involved participants, usually teens, taking large amounts of Benadryl and recording the effects. While Benadryl can be safe if taken at the recommended dosages, taking large amounts can result in confusion, delirium, and psychosis, as well as organ damage, convulsions, coma, and even death.

Since the beginning of this social media challenge, there have been reports of several teens across the country having been hospitalized after taking large doses of the medication with the intention of filming and uploading the videos. Some of these hospitalizations have resulted in death. While TikTok reported to be unaware of the content, they disabled the hashtags (search terms) "Benadryl" and "BenadrylChallenge." However, users have been reported trying to get around these blocks by using the terms "BenaChallenge" or "BenaryChallenge."

Before 2020, in Minnesota, calls to the poison control center regarding the intentional use of products containing diphenhydramine (including Benadryl) by youth and young adults under age 25 were nearly zero. Coinciding with the introduction of the challenge, the number of these calls skyrocketed (see Figure 1), with teens between the ages of 15 and 19 making up the majority of calls.

Calls regarding intentional diphenhydramine use in youth and young adults

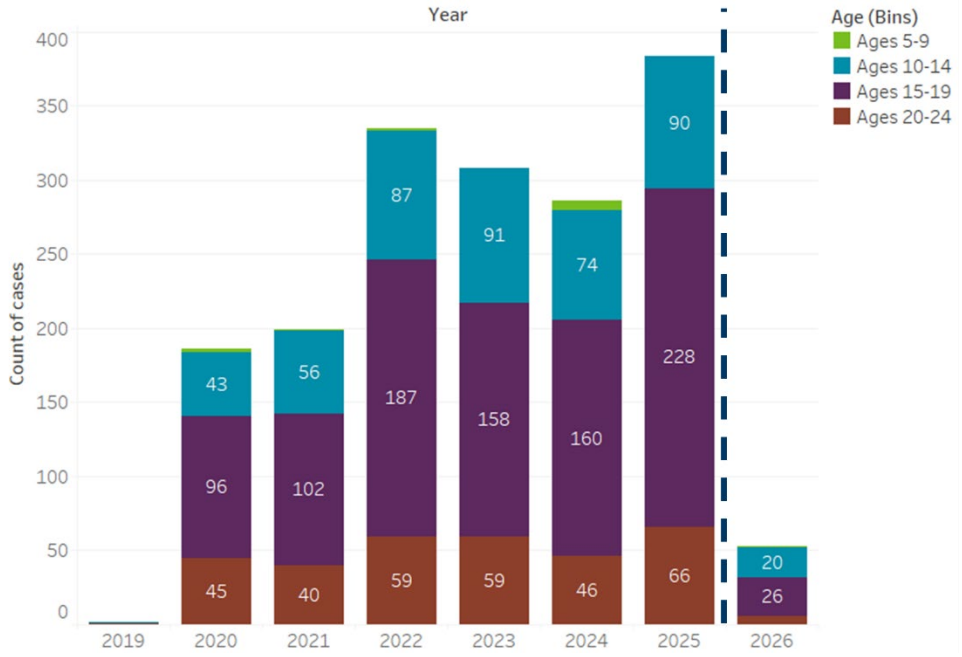

Figure 1 illustrates the total number calls per year made to the Minnesota Regional Poison Control Center regarding the intentional use of diphenhydramine-containing products in Minnesotans between 0 and 24 years of age. Data current as of February 9, 2026.

What parents, teachers, and other trusted adults can do

- **Talk openly with your child:** Ask what they are seeing online and whether they've heard about challenges involving medicines. Explain that taking more medicine than directed can be dangerous, even if it seems like a trend or a joke online.
- **Store medicines safely:** Keep all medicines, including over-the-counter products like Benadryl, in a secure place. Make sure medicines are stored out of sight and reach of children and teens.
- **Watch for warning signs**:
  - Empty or missing medicine bottles
  - Sudden drowsiness, confusion, or agitation
  - Changes in behavior, secrecy, or hiding their phone
  - New interest in online challenges or risky trends

If you are concerned about medication poisoning, call the Minnesota Regional Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222. For immediate medical attention, call 911.

Resources

- FDA warns about serious problems with high doses of the allergy medicine diphenhydramine (Benadryl) | FDA (https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-warns-about-serious-problems-high-doses-allergy-medicine-diphenhydramine-benadryl)
- Diphenhydramine Toxicity | University of Utah (https://poisoncontrol.utah.edu/news/2021/11/diphenhydramine-toxicity)

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https://www.health.mn.gov/communities/substanceuse/index.html

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