

# Study: 700,000 a year treated for reactions to medicines

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Associated Press

CHICAGO — Harmful reactions to some of the most widely used medicines send more than 700,000 Americans to emergency rooms each year, according to a government study.

Accidental overdoses and allergic reactions to prescription drugs are the most frequent

causes of serious illnesses, according to the study, the first to reveal the nationwide scope of the problem.

"This is an important study because it reinforces the really substantial risks that there are in everyday use of drugs," said patient-safety specialist Bruce Lambert, a professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago's college of pharmacy.

Even so, the study authors and others agreed that the 700,000 estimate was conservative because drug reactions are likely often misdiagnosed.

The study found that a small group of pharmaceutical war-horses were most commonly implicated, including insulin for diabetes; warfarin for clotting problems; and amoxicillin, a penicillin-like antibiotic used

for infections.

"These are old drugs which are known to be extremely effective. We could not and would not want to live without them. But you've got to get the dose exactly right," Lambert said. He was not involved in the study.

Those 65 and older faced more than double the risk of requiring emergency-room treatment and were nearly seven

times as likely to be admitted to the hospital as younger patients.

The results, from 2004-05, represent the first two years of data from a national surveillance project on outpatient drug safety. The project was developed by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. The study was published in today's *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

The database included 63 nationally representative hospitals that reported 21,298 bad

drug reactions among U.S. residents treated in emergency rooms during the two-year period. The tally is based on what emergency-room doctors said were complications from using prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, dietary supplements or herbal treatments.

The researchers said it translates to 701,547 complications nationwide each year.

"Experts had thought that severe outpatient drug events were common, but no one really had good numbers" until now, said the lead author, Dr. Daniel Budnitz, a CDC researcher.