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Careful what you swallow

By Bill McCarthy

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CHEYENNE - Cold and flu season can bring dangers that are less than obvious.

Many people may not know that commonly prescribed medications can interact with over-the-counter drugs to make them sicker.

"You should always ask your pharmacist before taking anything," said Kate Ramirez, a pharmacist at Town & Country Pharmacy in Cheyenne.

You don't have to get your prescriptions there to ask the pharmacist about potential interactions, she added.

Commonly prescribed antidepressants, asthma medications, blood thinners, sleep aids and blood pressure medications may cause potentially harmful interactions with over-the-counter decongestants, antihistamines, antacids and pain relievers.

Drug interactions also may lessen or enhance the effects of a drug. And some drug interactions can be fatal.

People taking blood pressure medications and antidepressants should be especially careful, Ramirez said.

Anyone using these medications should be sure to speak with a doctor or pharmacist before taking over-the-counter cold and flu medications.

Ramirez said some families buy different kinds of over-the-counter drugs to treat common illnesses like cold and flu.

Still, people on prescription drugs should not take a drug because a family member or friend is using it successfully without first discussing it with a pharmacist or doctor.

Maintaining a list of the over-the-counter and prescription drugs you are taking and sharing it with a doctor or pharmacist before adding any medications is recommended by the Food and Drug Administration.