



The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System
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NEWS RELEASE

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Caution Required When Traveling With Medications

Steven Marcus, executive and medical director,
New Jersey Poison Information and Education System, available for interviews

- Medication abuse is on the rise in the U.S.
- How to travel safely with medications
- Seniors with poor vision can easily make catastrophic mistakes
- "Pharming" is a growing trend for teens looking for cheap highs
- Hot line is first line of defense
- Program and post NJPIES hot line number **(1-800-222-1222)** in and near all phones

NEWARK, N.J. — June 29, 2010 — Vacation season is upon us, and once the kids are dismissed from school for the summer travel plans become reality. Travel preparations can be overwhelming when the goal is to pack the essentials and keep suitcases light. For those who need to travel with medications, it is important to be aware of how to carry them safely to avoid them falling into the hands of children or being compromised as the result of temperature changes.

"Keeping prescriptions safe from the elements and out of reach of children when traveling should be part of planning this summer's adventures," said Dr. Steven Marcus, executive and medical director of the New Jersey Poison Information and Education System. "Even though not all medications fall under the Controlled Substance Act, medications are, by definition, controlled substances and can be very dangerous if taken by anyone other than the person for whom the medicine has been prescribed. Vacations are meant to distract us from our jobs and usual functions, but we must stay alert to dangers that are around us, for one thing, by keeping an eye on medications and who has access to them. This, hopefully, will ensure that no accidental exposure or misuse occurs," he said.

The situation is a concern in New Jersey, where state data from NJPIES show that poison incidences

involving prescription and OTC medications have risen from 38 percent of all reported exposures in 2000 to 47.7 percent in 2008.

There are strong indications that prescription and OTC medication abuse is on the rise.[1] Travel, with its associated relaxation of attention to details such as where medications are stored, is an open invitation for individuals to gain access and misuse or abuse such medications. In testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs, Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, noted that seven of the top 11 drugs most commonly abused by teens are either prescribed or purchased over the counter.[2]

In a 2008 study conducted by the Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey, 44 percent of New Jersey parents knew little or nothing about the dangers of prescription drug abuse.[3] Last year, NJPIES received 286 cases of intentional abuse by teens (between 13 and 19 years of age), and of those reported cases 60.5 percent were the result of prescription and OTC medications. According to Dr. Marcus, good advice to follow when traveling is to know where your prescription and OTC medications are at all times. Medications that one least expects to cause problems can be very harmful; for example, analgesics, such as Tylenol®, Advil® and Motrin®, top the list as the most frequently reported toxic substances. Parents have been educated about the dangers of street drugs, but the more obvious risks associated with sedatives and stimulants, e.g., ADHD medications and pain medications, are being overlooked. Summer is the time when teens have more free time and are more apt to experiment with medications.

Prescription drug abuse is not just a problem among teenagers; adults ages 40-49 account for half of all documented cases of prescription drug abuse, according to a study by Medco Health Solutions Inc., Franklin Lakes, N.J.[4]

“New Jersey families are not addressing the problem because they aren’t aware of it,” said Dr. Marcus. He suggests that all households purchase and use “medication safes,” which can be purchased relatively inexpensively and can be used at home and be taken on vacation with the family.

Seniors are vulnerable to unintentional poisoning during travel season partly because they are often prescribed more than one medication. Increased availability plus mix-ups due to poor vision or inadvertent combinations of medications put them at risk. Travel with grandparents presents the possibility that children may be exposed to the seniors’ medications. Using the aforementioned medication safe would be useful in prevention of such episodes. According to NJPIES it is extremely important to keep children, seniors and pets safe from medications. Three helpful tips for travelers include: (1) Store medications in locked suitcases or containers; (2) keep medications in their original, child-resistant containers; and (3) never refer to medications as candy.

Additional safety tips for traveling with medications, as reported by eHow[5], are:

- Store medications in tightly closed, original pharmacy-labeled containers for protection from heat and light.
- Place medications in carry-on luggage for easy access and to prevent loss in case your luggage is lost.
- Bring extra medications and keep them in a separate bag in case the first set of medications is misplaced.
- Carry a duplicate prescription in the event a refill is needed.

- When carrying syringes, carry a copy of the prescription from the doctor.
- Have on hand in your carry-on bag a schedule and complete list of all medications, which includes name, dosage and purpose for taking each prescription.
- Keep a list of your doctors and pharmacist, with complete contact information.

Call to action

NJPIES leaders urge medical professionals, parents, educators, caregivers and the general public to call the toll-free poison center hot line, 1-800-222-1222, to learn more about the risks of traveling with medication, or with questions about any poisoning emergency.

New Jersey is taking an aggressive posture in combating the growing problem of abuse of prescription drugs through Operation Medicine Cabinet. On Nov. 13, 2010, the Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey and local police departments throughout the state will be inviting residents to bring expired and unused medications to selected sites for proper and safe disposal.[6]

About NJPIES

As New Jersey's only poison control center, the New Jersey Poison Information and Education System provides information on poison prevention and treatments. Chartered in 1983, NJPIES provides free consultation through telephone hot line services and the Web. Medical professionals such as physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer confidential advice regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention, drugs, food poisoning, animal bites and more. These specialists are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

NJPIES coordinates state poison education and research and is designated as the regional poison center by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It tracks incidences of adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines in order to monitor potential public health issues and to provide data to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A division of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health of the New Jersey Medical School of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, its state-of-the-art center is located on the school's Newark campus.

New Jersey residents seeking immediate information about treating poison emergencies, and those with any drug information questions, should call the toll-free hot line, **800-222-1222**, anytime. The hearing impaired may call **973-926-8008**. For more information, visit www.njpies.org or call **973-972-9280**.

About UMDNJ

The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey is the nation's largest freestanding public health sciences university, with more than 5,500 students in attendance. The state's three medical schools, a dental school, a graduate school of biomedical sciences, a school of health-related professions, a school of nursing and a school of public health are housed on five campuses — Newark, New Brunswick/Piscataway, Scotch Plains, Camden and Stratford. Annually, there are more than 2 million patient visits at UMDNJ facilities and faculty practices at the campuses. UMDNJ operates University Hospital, a level I trauma center in Newark, and University Behavioral HealthCare, a mental health and addiction services network.

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