

The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System — Serving New Jersey Since 1983

## NEWS RELEASE

Media to contact:  
800-222-1222  
800-962-1253 if outside NJ

For Immediate Release  
May 30, 2018

### The Unknown Dangers of Allergy Season

– Poison Control Warns Allergy Meds Can Contribute to Drugged Driving –

**(Newark, NJ) – Warning. Allergy sufferers must err on the side of caution when driving under the influence of allergy medicines. Many legal (prescription and over-the-counter/OTC) drugs including oral antihistamines make driving unsafe due to side effects like sleepiness, loss of focus/attention, blurred vision and decreased coordination.**

Case: A 17-year-old male suffering from seasonal allergies decided to take a non-prescription antihistamine prior to leaving for tennis practice. Approximately thirty minutes afterwards, he began feeling drowsy and dizzy. His parents noticed his altered state and prevented him from driving. His father called the NJ Poison Control Center to find out how long the side effects would last.

NJ Poison Control experts remind consumers that all medicines have side effects associated with them even when they are taken according to the directions. Experts suggest using caution when taking allergy medicines or giving them to children. Many may assume non-prescription (OTC) medicines do not carry risks because they are sold without a prescription. NJ Poison Control experts disagree: they answer daily calls for help involving OTC products (side effects, drug interactions, overdose, etc.). Many non-prescription medicines can produce serious side effects which may cause harm to those taking them.

Before you reach for allergy medicine, either OTC or prescription, we recommend the following tips to prevent problems related to medication use:

- **Select medications that treat ONLY the symptoms you have.** For example, use a decongestant if you are congested, but only use decongestants with cough suppressant if you have a cough as well.
- **Be mindful that many medicines contain more than one ingredient, and some may even contain alcohol.** Many ingredients used in medicine can interact dangerously with alcohol causing side effects like nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, fainting, and/or loss of coordination. Keep in mind that these interactions can still occur even if they were not ingested at the same time.
- **Watch for duplicate active ingredients in products taken at the same time.** Many medications contain the same active ingredients, even if they have different names and/or intended purposes. Taking these together, even if each is in the intended dose, can result in serious overdose.
- **More does not mean better.** Don't take medicines longer or in higher doses than the label recommends. If symptoms persist, it is time to see a doctor.

- **Be very careful about dosage recommendations especially with children.** With liquid medications, it is best to use a measuring spoon or dosing cup. Do not use a kitchen spoon.
- **Avoid adverse drug interactions.** If you are currently taking any prescription or non-prescription medications, ask your pharmacist or health care provider for assistance in choosing non-prescription medications. If unavailable, contact the health professionals at the NJ Poison Control Center anytime day or night for fast, free, medical advice **1-800-222-1222**  
[www.njpies.org](http://www.njpies.org)

Remember, the message about “drugged driving” is clear...it is dangerous for you, your passengers, and others on the road. Law enforcement considers driving while under the influence of certain prescriptions or OTC medicines the same as driving under the influence of alcohol.

“If you are planning on driving while taking allergy medicine or any other medicine, please discuss this with your physician, your local pharmacist, or our staff here at the NJ Poison Control Center to find out how the medicine may affect you and your driving ability,” says Diane Calello, MD, [NJ Poison Control Center](#) Executive and Medical Director, [Rutgers NJ Medical School’s Department of Emergency Medicine](#). “Our staff is always here to help you prevent exposures/injuries. Remember, safety isn’t an accident, it’s a choice.”

Poison control centers are a great resource for emergencies, information and prevention education. Keep the Poison Help line at your fingertips. Save 1-800-222-1222 as a contact in your phone.

### **Help is Just a Phone Call Away!**

We are social. Join us on Facebook ([@NJPIES](#)) and Twitter ([@NJPoisonCenter](#)) for breaking news, safety tips, trivia questions, etc.

### **Real People. Real Answers.**

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#### **Available for Media Interviews**

Diane P. Calello, MD, Executive and Medical Director, New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES)  
Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D., Managing Director, New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES)

#### **About NJPIES**

Chartered in 1983, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES) is New Jersey’s only poison control center. Medical professionals such as physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer free consultation through hotline services (telephone, text and chat) regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention, drugs, food poisoning, animal bites and more. In addition, it tracks incidences of adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines in order to monitor potential public health issues and provide data to the New Jersey Department of Health, U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NJPIES’ confidential services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. When needed, NJPIES responds to other emergent health issues by expanding hotline services.

NJPIES is designated as the state’s regional poison control center by the New Jersey Department of Health and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It is a division of the Department of Emergency Medicine of Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. NJPIES has a state-of-the-art center located at Rutgers Health Sciences in Newark. NJPIES is funded, in part, by the NJ Department of Health, NJ Hospitals and the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

New Jersey residents should save the Poison Help number, 1-800-222-1222, in their mobile phones and post the number somewhere visible in their home. NJPIES is also available via text [8002221222@njpies.org](mailto:8002221222@njpies.org) and chat [www.njpies.org](http://www.njpies.org).  
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**About Rutgers**

Established in 1766, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is America's eighth oldest institution of higher learning and one of the nation's premier public research universities. Serving more than 65,000 students on campuses, centers, institutes and other locations throughout the state, Rutgers is the only public university in New Jersey that is a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities.

Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) is the health care education, research, and clinical division of Rutgers University, comprising nine schools and their attendant faculty practices, centers, institutes and clinics; New Jersey's leading comprehensive cancer care center; and New Jersey's largest behavioral health care network.

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