

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

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Hectic and Hazardous Holiday Season

Tips for Preventable Mishaps

(Newark, NJ) – The Holiday Season is upon us and, with it comes rapidly changing winter weather conditions, increased travel, family obligations, and to-do lists a mile long. The most wonderful time of year can quickly turn hazardous as holiday stressors increase the risk for preventable poisoning injuries. Whether you're traveling near or far, hosting or attending a gathering, or just cozying up at home for the holidays, mishaps do happen. Many common household products can pose a significant risk, especially during this busy time of year, it's important to know where to turn for immediate medical help when an emergency or question arises.

"The holidays are an exciting yet potentially dangerous time of year," says Diane Calello, MD, Executive and Medical Director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](#)'s Department of Emergency Medicine. "We become distracted and forget to pay attention to what's happening around us, especially in our homes. Often unintentional poisoning injuries occur right under our noses."

Safety is no accident, it's a choice. It's far easier to prevent a tragedy than to treat one. "Take a few minutes today to learn how to reduce your family's risk of serious injury. A few minutes today may save a loved one tomorrow," says Calello. Anything can be a poison if it is used in the wrong way, in the wrong amount, or by the wrong person; the dose determines how toxic something is or isn't in the body. "Potential household dangers involve more than just medicines. There are many products in and around your home that can cause serious life-threatening injuries and even death."

Home

- **Medicine** – Be sure to provide house guests with a secure (locked) place to store their medicines (over the counter, prescription, vitamins, herbal or dietary supplements) while visiting. If possible, this place should be out of sight and reach of children, teens, and pets. Remember never to leave medicines in a purse, on a nightstand or counter, or in the bathroom as the items are easily accessible from these places.
- **Carbon Monoxide (CO)** – Don't be fooled, carbon monoxide can and does kill every year. CO is a poisonous gas overlooked by many because it gives no warning – you can't see, smell, hear, or taste it. Also, symptoms of CO poisoning can easily be confused with symptoms of viral illnesses like the common cold and the flu. The buildup of carbon monoxide gas is virtually undetectable without an alarm; it is crucial to have CO detectors on every level of your home including outside sleeping areas. Common sources of CO exposure involve poorly ventilated gas appliances, fireplaces, and heating systems. Lesser-known sources of exposure include portable gas

generators used during severe weather; snow accumulation in car exhausts/tailpipes, heating and dryer vents; portable room heaters; fireplace/chimney flues; blocked engine and exhaust systems on boats; and smoking hookah in small and/or poorly ventilated spaces.

- **Disc Batteries & Magnets** – These items are usually found in watches, toys, games, flashing costume jewelry, singing greeting cards, holiday decorations, remote control devices, etc. They are easy to swallow and can cause serious harm to children and pets. Besides being a choking hazard, disc batteries can cause serious burns if stuck in the throat or stomach and may even cause death, while magnets can cause serious harm to internal organs if swallowed.
- **Pets** – Unintentional poisonings happen to pets, too. Make sure to keep the following products out of sight and reach of pets — chocolate, cocoa, candy and sugarless gum that contains xylitol, yeast bread, dough, leftover fatty meat scraps, fruitcakes with raisins and currants, alcohol and illicit drugs. Ingestion of any of these can cause serious harm and even death. Also be on the lookout for loose wiring which can cause electrocution; keep wires out of sight and reach.

Entertaining

- **Food Safety** – Getting sick from eating contaminated food is quite common; contamination can occur at any point during the food production chain — from production to preparation (restaurant or home).¹ Although anyone is susceptible to food poisoning, it is important to remember that the effects may be more serious for certain groups; young children, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems. The symptoms of food poisoning typically occur a few hours after consuming contaminated food, and include; nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhea, and fever.
- **Alcohol** (beer, wine, liquor, cocktails) – Many at-home parties serve alcoholic beverages. If accidentally swallowed by children and/or pets, leftover cocktails can be fatal! Alcohol affects children and pets differently than it does adults, so even ingesting a small amount can be very toxic. Always empty beverage glasses and place them up high and out of reach of curious children and pets. A person who seems very drunk or has passed out may be showing early signs of alcohol poisoning and be in real danger. Immediate medical help is essential. “Sleeping it off” is never a safe option. Know the [critical signs](#) of alcohol poisoning.
- **Marijuana Edibles** – Be mindful of what guests bring into your home. Many edible products look nearly identical to store-bought candy and other food products – with similar names and packaging, but whose spellings or wrapper color might be slightly different. Unsuspecting adults and children may not be able to tell the products apart; pets surely can’t. These products may contain high concentrations of drugs, causing the potential for severe effects if ingested by vulnerable populations.
- **Vaping Products and Liquid Nicotine** – Liquid nicotine exposures continue to concern poison center specialists. It is important to remember that liquid nicotine, also known as e-liquid, vape juice, or e-juice, contains concentrated nicotine. Swallowing even small amounts of this concentrate poses serious even fatal health consequences for young children and pets. When not in use, vaping products including their refill liquids must be stored in a locked area, out of sight and reach. A loved one’s life depends on it.

¹ CDC. [The Food Production Chain](#)

Along with these tips, parents should speak to children about asking a trusted adult before touching or tasting anything that may be unfamiliar. "Many people, especially those who are not used to worrying about the curious minds of small children or pets, often forget that some of the things we carry with us pose a real threat if used in the wrong way or by the wrong person," warns Calello. "Things like medicine, certain foods, and even personal care products can be dangerous in the hands of the wrong person (or animal). Prevent a tragedy, leave a secure place for guests to keep purses, bags, coats, or any other personal belongings out of sight and reach of children and pets."

If you suspect illness, do not wait until symptoms occur or waste time looking up information on the internet. Contact your local poison control center at 1-800-222-1222 to get the immediate help you or a loved one needs. Center experts are health professionals available 24/7 for emergencies, questions, concerns, or information. Services are free, confidential, and a language line is available (over 150 languages). New Jersey residents can reach their center in the following ways: call (1-800-222-1222), [text](#), or [chat](#).

If someone is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up, or seizing, call 9-1-1 immediately.

Help is Just a Phone Call Away!

Stay Connected: Facebook ([@NJPIES](#)) and Twitter ([@NJPoisonCenter](#)) for breaking news, safety tips, trivia questions, etc.

Real People. Real Answers.

Available for Media Interviews

Diane P. Calello, MD, Executive and Medical Director, New Jersey Poison Control Center, Rutgers NJ Medical School's Department of Emergency Medicine

Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D., Managing Director, New Jersey Poison Control Center, Rutgers NJ Medical School's Department of Emergency Medicine

Lewis S. Nelson, MD, Professor and Chair of Emergency Medicine at Rutgers NJ Medical School

About New Jersey Poison Control Center / 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 to monitor for 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](tel:8002221222) and chat www.njpies.org.

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About Rutgers New Jersey Medical School

Founded in 1954, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School is the oldest school of medicine in the state. Today it is part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and graduates approximately 170 physicians a year. In addition to providing the MD degree, the school offers MD/PhD, MD/MPH and MD/MBA degrees through collaborations with other institutions of higher education. Dedicated to excellence in education, research, clinical care and community outreach, the medical school comprises 20 academic departments and works with several healthcare partners, including its principal teaching hospital, University Hospital. Its faculty consists of numerous world-renowned scientists and

many of the region's "top doctors." Home to the nation's oldest student-run clinic, New Jersey Medical School hosts more than 50 centers and institutes, including the Public Health Research Institute Center, the Global Tuberculosis Institute and the Neurological Institute of New Jersey. For more information please visit: njms.rutgers.edu.

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