



**NEWS RELEASE**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System**

Serving New Jersey Since 1983

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**New Jersey Poison Control Launches  
7 Days and 7 Ways to Safety Campaign**

**Goal is to prevent accidental poisonings**

Campaign highlights:

- Supports National Poison Prevention Week, March 14-20, 2010
- Ongoing school visits to educate children on poison safety
- Professional training of emergency service personnel at UMDNJ
- Daily Facebook postings with cleanup tips
- Case studies being published to show sample calls, responses and results
- Daily photo of look-alike toxic products commonly ingested by mistake
- Certificate of Resolution and Governor's Proclamation planned
- 24/7 toll-free hotline 1-800-222-1222, with bilingual assistance

**NEWARK, N.J. (March 8, 2010)** — In recognition of Poison Prevention Week, March 14-20, the New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES) is launching "7 Days and 7 Ways to Safety," a campaign providing simple daily tips that New Jersey residents can follow in order to ensure a safer home or work environment. The goal of the NJPIES campaign is to help citizens take easy steps to avoid unnecessary exposures to or interactions with potential poisons.

Each year, according to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, more than one million children and another one million senior citizens are involved in poisoning situations that could have been avoided. In New Jersey, more than 71,000 cases of poisonings and related experiences were fielded in 2009 by NJPIES with issues ranging from prescription drug interactions to food and pet poisonings.

As part of the week's ongoing activities, the Poison Center will post a "tip of the day" on its Facebook page ([www.Facebook.com/NJPIES](http://www.Facebook.com/NJPIES)) for improving home safety. Simple steps such as locking up medications or dangerous substances and avoiding the use of containers commonly used for food storage to store nonfood substances will be highlighted. In addition, the campaign will post a daily case study and a photo of products commonly mistaken for each other that cause confusion and unintentional poisonings.

**Spring into action**

Poison Prevention week leads into the first day of spring, on March 20. "This is an ideal

time to take spring-cleaning to a new level and clean out your medicine cabinets, closets and pantries, garages and sheds,” notes Dr. Steven Marcus, executive and medical director, NJPIES. “Many of the suggested tips can also be used in schools or at work.”

1. Lock toxins away. We are trained to lock away valuables, but from a poison perspective it's more important to lock away medications and toxins so family members and pets don't gain access to these dangerous materials. Toxic substances should be under lock and key. Purchase lockable containers for the materials, including a lockable medicine cabinet.
2. Use protective seals. Medications and potential toxic substances come with child-resistant caps. These caps work only if they are replaced promptly and correctly.
3. Label everything clearly. It's best to keep products in their original packages, but if you cannot, make sure the new containers are correctly labeled so everyone can know what's inside. NEVER use containers that formerly contained food or beverages to store toxic substances!

These are just some of the tips and tricks the Poison Center will be posting throughout the week on Facebook and highlighting in educational and training sessions.

### **Children and seniors are at high risk**

Poisons are defined by the American Association of Poison Control Centers as “any product or substance that can harm someone if it is used in the wrong way, by the wrong person, or in the wrong amount.” Everything from water to prescription and illegal drugs is potentially poisonous when not used appropriately or in the correct dosage. Everyone is susceptible to a poisoning if proper precautions are not taken.

Two at-risk groups are children under the age of 6 and senior citizens. For both, common mishaps occur with look-alike products. One example is over-the-counter cold medication tablets being confused with candies such as M&Ms and Skittles. Exposures among young children typically account for 50% of all calls received by the New Jersey center, matching statistics seen by other poison centers around the country.

“We recommend that medicines, liquids and cleaning agents never be removed from their original packaging,” notes Alicia Gambino, NJPIES director of public education. Her reasoning is twofold:

1. Original packages contain all the ingredient information that allows a poison specialist to better access the protocol needed should someone accidentally come into contact with a toxic agent.
2. Look-alike products such as tiki oil and apple juice or Ex-lax and chocolate are less likely to be mistaken when they remain in their original packaging.

Calls involving senior citizens are also on the rise due in part to the increasing number of prescriptions being written. Causes stem from seniors misreading bottles and taking the wrong prescription, to interactions from multiple contraindicated medications taken at the same time. One solution is for seniors to request the new large-print labels commonly available from many pharmacies.

## **Drug deaths outpace vehicular deaths in New Jersey**

Drug exposures are a top priority in New Jersey. New Jersey is one of 16 states where the number of unintentional deaths due to drugs is higher than the number of deaths from vehicular accidents.

Analgesics — pain medicines of all sorts including aspirin, acetaminophen and ibuprofen as well as prescription oxycodone — account for the highest number of poison incidences across all age groups throughout the country. Nationally, poison control centers have found that analgesics are the most frequently reported toxic substance to which callers have been exposed, accounting for 12.9% of the calls. Data from NJPIES shows that for 2009, New Jersey's experience is similar to the national trend, with 11.7% of calls related to analgesics use.

## **New Jersey Poison Center's reach expands**

Due to the state's dense population, New Jersey's Poison Center is one of the busiest across the country. As one of 61 regional centers around the U.S., NJPIES fields 200-300 calls a day to its toll-free hotline **(1-800-222-1222)** with issues ranging from lead poisoning to carbon monoxide exposures.

The New Jersey Poison Information and Education System is an active resource for information and intervention assistance for residents, people in the workforce, and medical and emergency service personnel. Camden County logs more calls than any county in the state, with 5,736 calls received in 2009.

Most calls originate from the public, but calls are frequently received from medical and emergency service personnel seeking assistance with difficult cases. Calls from hospital staff have increased by 35% over the past 10 years, with calls from Bergen County hospitals increasing by 65%.

In January, the center was targeted for cutbacks or even possible extinction by a report released by the governor's health transition team. Citizens and public health officials have subsequently been voicing their support for this valued service. Two online petitions started by a concerned Rutgers pharmacy student — one for the general public and one for pharmacy students — now have a combined total of more than 1,000 signatures. In addition, the NJPIES Facebook site, started the last week of 2009, has a growing fan base with close to 100 new fans weekly. It is expected to have 1,000 followers by the start of Poison Prevention Week.

Started in 1961, National Poison Prevention Week is dedicated to raising awareness about the dangers of unintentional poisonings. The New Jersey Poison Center participates each year with ongoing school visits and specialized professional training sessions held throughout the month.

"We are using Poison Prevention Week and the entire month of March to highlight our 24/7 accessibility to the public," states NJPIES' Dr. Marcus. "There are no silly questions, and trained staff are always available to answer a question, quell a fear, provide advice, or intervene to get emergency services on site and prepped to provide the needed protocol in the fastest response time." He adds, "When in doubt, don't hesitate to call **1-800-222-1222.**"

## **About NJPIES**

As New Jersey's only poison control center, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System provides information on poison prevention and treatments. Initiating service 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 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, **1-800-222-1222**, any time. Spanish-speaking assistance is available. The hearing impaired may call **973-926-8008**. For more information, visit [www.njpies.org](http://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 attending. 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 two 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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