

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
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Alcohol Overdose Requires Medical Attention

“Sleeping it off” is a Dangerous Myth

(Newark, NJ) – As spring turns to summer, poison control centers around the country see a spike in alcohol-related calls. It’s a time of year when alcohol-infused celebrations become commonplace; those who overindulge often pay the price for their risky drinking behaviors. Whether it’s a major milestone like prom or graduation, a backyard barbeque, a summer holiday weekend, or a day at the beach, drinking alcohol should always be done responsibly. Situations can quickly become dangerous when too much alcohol is involved; alcohol impairs both physical and mental abilities and can cause serious health effects especially when mixed with other substances like medicines (prescriptions, over-the-counters, dietary/herbal supplements).

Case: Teenage female was brought into an emergency room after drinking alcohol at a party and was put to bed by her parents. She vomited numerous times and ended up in a potentially life-threatening situation.

The CDC (Center for Disease Control and Prevention) considers alcohol to be one of the most commonly used addictive drugs by adults and teens in the United States today. “Alcohol poisoning is more common and life-threatening than many realize,” warns Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D., Managing Director of the [NJ Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School’s Department of Emergency Medicine](#). “Intoxication can lead to death or permanent brain damage. A person who consumes a fatal dose of alcohol may stop breathing or choke on their vomit while unconscious. As alcohol levels continue to rise in the body, a person who looks asleep may very well be unconscious.”

Drinking alcohol responsibly decreases the risk of dangerous health effects. When people do not know their limits, they often consume excessive amounts of alcohol in short periods of time (binge drinking), leading to dangerously high levels of alcohol in the body. Many factors influence the amount of time between drinking alcohol and feeling its intoxicating effects (i.e. gender, weight, how much food is in the stomach, hormones, metabolic rate, race). Some overindulge without realizing they have consumed too much alcohol.

Alcohol poisoning is **preventable**. Keep these important facts in mind; it could mean the difference between life and death.

- **“Sleeping it off” is never a safe option;** time is the only thing that can reverse the effects of alcohol except time is not on your side when dealing with alcohol poisoning. A person who appears to be very drunk or has passed out may be showing early signs of alcohol poisoning and in real danger. **Don’t guess, make the call;** immediate medical help is required. Under the

Overdose Prevention Act anyone who, in good faith, seeks medical assistance for an overdose victim is immune from arrest and prosecution, as is the person suffering the overdose.

(<https://nj.gov/oag/newsreleases13/pr20130702a.html>)

- **Understand how much you're drinking;** because alcohol is a legally obtainable substance (by those 21+) many forget how potentially dangerous alcohol can be. Some may consider how many drinks they've had, but don't consider the volume or alcohol content of those drinks. A standard drink is said to be: 12 oz of beer (at 5% ABV*), 5oz of wine (12% ABV), or 1.5 oz of 80-proof liquor (40% ABV). Whether at home, restaurant, or a party, most alcoholic drinks are not consistently measured, therefore, it is very difficult to know exactly how much alcohol a person is consuming. In addition, drinks today, especially craft beers, often have a much higher alcohol content than they did in the past. (*ABV stands for Alcohol by volume)
- **Know the critical signs of alcohol poisoning;** alcohol poisoning is a real and life-threatening consequence of drinking alcohol. There are many myths surrounding the factors that can lead to alcohol poisoning, but it's important to know that this can happen to **anyone** who consumes alcohol and to recognize the signs:
 - Mental confusion, stupor, coma (or person cannot be woken up)
 - Slow or irregular breathing
 - Blueish skin color or low body heat
 - Vomiting
 - Seizures

"If anyone, regardless of age, has concerns about the effects of alcohol, alcohol poisoning, or alcohol-related illnesses, the medical experts at the New Jersey Poison Control Center are a phone call away. As a medical emergency and information-based resource, our priority is to ensure the health and well-being of all New Jersey residents without hesitation or bias," says Ruck. All calls to the poison control center are confidential and free of charge.

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

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 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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