

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

## NEWS RELEASE

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

For Immediate Release

### **NJ Poison Control Center Answers Residents' Questions About Coronavirus** Credible Resource for Information Concerning Emerging COVID-19 Outbreak

**(Newark, NJ)** – Late last month, Governor Murphy and the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) quickly responded to state residents' concerns about the potential spread of novel coronavirus, now called Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). State officials implemented a comprehensive public health and safety response to prepare the state's healthcare systems for potential COVID-19 cases. As part of the state's response to this evolving public health emergency, the NJDOH collaborated with the New Jersey Poison Control Center, a 24/7 hotline monitored by specialized medical professionals (doctors, nurses, and pharmacists) — providing the New Jersey public with credible information to alleviate fear and dispel rumors about the novel coronavirus outbreak. Calls to the poison center's hotline, 1-800-222-1222, are free and confidential and information can be communicated in any language.

"As with any emerging disease; information is evolving fast. We opened our phone lines to provide a credible resource to both the public and healthcare professionals concerned with this new public health concern. We were quickly joined by other Poison Control Centers nationwide and have now become part of the national surveillance and response effort for this expanding outbreak. The New Jersey Poison Control Center is working closely with the New Jersey Department of Health, area hospitals, and other public health agencies around the state to closely monitor this evolving outbreak, and provide up-to-date, accurate information," 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.

Since opening the phone lines on January 28, 2020, the New Jersey Poison Control Center has answered over 700 calls from the public, healthcare professionals, and other concerned citizens. "We are constantly monitoring questions as they arise and participate daily with briefings from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the New Jersey Department of Health to ensure our staff is up-to-date on any and all new information," says Calello.

Below are some of the common questions poison center staff are answering regarding Coronavirus Disease 2019:

- **What is a coronavirus?**

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses which cause a variety of symptoms and can be very common. The 2019 Novel Coronavirus, now called Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), first appeared in humans in December of 2019 and causes respiratory illness which can range from mild to severe. It is a new virus not previously seen in humans.

- **What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

People diagnosed with Coronavirus Disease 2019 have shown symptoms similar to other respiratory illnesses, such as fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

- **Am I at risk for COVID-19 in New Jersey?**

Currently, there are no reported cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey, and there are only a handful of cases in the United States. To limit the spread of the virus, federal health officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are screening travelers from affected regions of China—health and travel histories will determine if further evaluation is needed.

- **What steps can I take to prevent getting sick with this new coronavirus?**

Take the same action steps you would take to prevent getting sick with any respiratory illness, including the common cold or flu:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing. DO NOT use your hands to cover. This only increases the chance of spreading germs.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available. Soap and water are always the best option.
- Stay home if you're feeling sick helps stop the spread of these illnesses.

"Don't be misled by outdated or incorrect information regarding COVID-19. New outbreaks of this magnitude require information to change minute by minute. We strongly encourage New Jersey residents to contact our medical professionals at the poison control center to get accurate, credible and timely information about coronavirus disease," says Calello.

For more resources about Coronavirus Disease 2019, visit the [New Jersey Department of Health](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#).

If you have questions or concerns about Coronavirus Disease 2019, contact the New Jersey Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 to get the information you or a loved one needs. If you suspect a poison exposure. The center's services are free and confidential; information can be communicated in any language.

**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](#) and [Twitter](#) 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 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 973-339-0702 and chat [www.njpies.org](http://www.njpies.org). Stay Connected: [FB](#) / [Twitter](#) / [Website](#)

#### **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](http://njms.rutgers.edu).

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