

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  
June 23, 2020

### **Pool Chemicals: Necessary but Potentially Dangerous** Awareness Prevents Emergency Department Visits

**(Newark, NJ)** – Opening home swimming pools is often an exciting event as residents are anxious to kick off their shoes and jump into their summer tradition of cooling off in their backyard pools. Although poolside activities are a summer staple, they can come at a cost if you are not aware of potential dangers by the pool.

Before pool or hot tub water is safe to enjoy, it must be treated with chemicals to prevent algae, bacteria, viruses, parasites and other germs from contaminating the water. If the water is untreated, swimmers and hot tub users are at high risk for infections, illnesses and skin irritation also known as recreational water illnesses (RWIs). Such waterborne illnesses (swimmer's ear, hot tub rash, respiratory infection, urinary tract infections, and diarrhea) are easily spread by swallowing, breathing in, or having contact with contaminated water. Exposure to these germs can result in serious illnesses, therefore if you are feeling sick it's important to stay out of swimming areas and hot tubs.

"Using pool chemicals to prevent the growth of bacteria, viruses, parasites, and other harmful contaminants are necessary, but remember these are strong chemicals that carry significant risk for dangerous health effects if accidentally exposed or misused," 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. "For example, chlorine can cause eye irritation, breathing problems and lung injury if used in high concentrations or in poorly ventilated enclosed spaces. Pool chemicals are safe to use when you follow their directions and take the necessary precautions to store them safely. Simply storing these chemicals out of direct sun in a lockable area will significantly reduce poisoning risk. It's also extremely important to use products specially manufactured for home pools and hot tubs and not use products manufactured for commercial use."

The NJ Poison Control Center offers the following tips to stay healthy and injury free while enjoying your summer days in the water. It's important to safely handle and store swimming pool and hot tub chemicals to reduce poisoning risk:

- Do not swim while sick as bacteria and other germs can contaminate the water and make other very sick. It's easy to spread waterborne illnesses. Get out of the pool or hot tub to use the restroom; bodily fluids can contaminate water making it unsafe and dangerous.
- Swallowing pool water can be dangerous. Germs and other chemicals can cause serious health effects if ingested.

- Use test strips to check and maintain the necessary chemical levels (pH and chlorine) to keep the water safe.
- Store chemicals in a lockable area out of sight and reach of children and pets. Keep them in a cool, dry, well-ventilated area out of the sun.
- Read and follow the safety directions on the product's label during each use. Always keep chlorine and other chemicals in their original containers to avoid confusion and possible accidental ingestion.
- Never mix chemicals together; the combination could create a toxic gas which could have life-threatening effects. This risk also applies to mixing chemicals with ammonia.
- Chlorine should never be ingested. Avoid shaking chlorine containers to minimize dust, fumes and splashes. Avoid touching chlorine with bare hands.
- Open all chemicals in well-ventilated areas, preferably outdoors. Keep chlorine away from other combustible substances.
- When transporting chemicals, separate incompatible chemicals and tightly secure them to prevent spills.
- Be aware that swimming in chlorinated water can have the following effects: skin irritation that can trigger rashes; burning, itchy eyes; and can trigger or aggravate bronchial problems including asthma.
- Save the Poison Help line, 1-800-222-1222, in your phone for questions, concerns and emergencies.

"Knowing the potential dangers by the pool lets you prepare and ultimately prevent an avoidable illness or injury," says Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D., managing director of the New Jersey Poison Control Center. "If you are sick, stay out of pools, hot tubs, and other bodies of water that people swim and play in. Waterborne illness spreads quickly and can result in severe illness for those who come in contact with contaminated water. If you are feeling sick after swimming, call your local poison control center for fast treatment advice."

Although coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is not a waterborne illness, it is a serious lung illness spread through respiratory droplets when people stay in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet). As outdoor public pools, hot tubs, and water parks/playgrounds begin to reopen, it's extremely important to remember COVID-19 continues to cause illness in New Jersey. All residents must do their part to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their community by following [safe swimming practices](#) along with social distancing and [everyday preventative actions](#) to protect yourself. For more resources for communities and the general public, [click here](#). If you have a medical question or concern about COVID-19, call the Coronavirus Hotline at the New Jersey Poison Control Center at 1-800-962-1253.

If you have questions, concerns or an emergency regarding an exposure to a potentially dangerous substance or product, contact your local poison control center at 1-800-222-1222. Poison Center experts

are specialized health professionals (doctors, nurses, and pharmacists) available 24/7 to assist the general public or healthcare professionals. Services are free and confidential; callers have free access to a language line/interpretation service. New Jersey residents can reach their poison center in the following ways: Call (1-800-222-1222), Text (973-339-0702), or [Chat here](#) (website). If someone is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up, or having a seizure, 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, 1-800-222-1222**

Chartered in 1983, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES), known to the public as the New Jersey Poison Control Center, is the state's primary defense against injury and deaths from intentional and unintentional poisonings. It 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 at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. NJPIES has a state-of-the-art center located at Rutgers Biomedical and 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.

Hotline staff (physicians, registered nurses, and pharmacists) provide free, telemedicine consultation through hotline services (telephone, text, chat) regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention practices, drug interactions and overdoses, food poisoning, environmental chemical exposures, animal/insect bites and stings, plant and other outdoor exposures, carbon monoxide and lead poisonings, and more. NJPIES' services are free, confidential/private, available 24/7, and help is available in any language. Call 1-800-222-1222; Text 973-339-0702; [Chat](#). 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).

###