

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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Is it a Cold, the Flu or COVID-19? It Could be Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

(New Jersey) – As it continues to get colder in New Jersey, residents we will spend lots of time indoors with their heating systems working hard to keep them warm. Cold weather months not only bring unpleasant temperatures; they also bring an increased risk of developing health illnesses. It's much easier to get sick when you spend time indoors with many people at once, especially people you do not live with. The more time you spend together, the more contact you have with bacteria and viruses in the air and on commonly touched surfaces.

"As we head into this year's cold and flu season while battling our second wave of COVID-19, it's important you pay careful attention to the signs and symptoms you may be feeling," says Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Department of Emergency Medicine](#). "Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are similar to the symptoms you may experience with the common cold, seasonal flu, strep throat, and COVID-19. Overlooking an exposure to this poisonous gas puts you and your loved ones at risk for serious injury, and possible death."

Over the next several months, many people will develop common symptoms like nausea, vomiting, headache, weakness, dizziness, body aches, and tiredness. Many winter-related illnesses share these common symptoms early on, making the cause of the illness hard to diagnosis. This can cause confusion for the sick person and their healthcare provider. Not being able to clearly diagnose an illness can potentially delay life-saving treatments.

So, what's really making you sick this time of year? Is it a bacterial or viral infection or illness spread from person-to-person? Do you have a carbon monoxide (CO) leak in your heating system or other gas appliances? Were you using a portable generator or other fuel-burning equipment indoors? Yes, that's right. Coming into contact with poisonous carbon monoxide gas is extremely dangerous and can make you sick. The symptoms you may experience are similar to the symptoms of bacterial or viral illnesses.

CO gas can leak from your heating system and other gas appliances in your home or apartment without you knowing. This poisonous gas is impossible to detect if you do not have working carbon monoxide detectors inside your living space. The gas gives no warning since you can't see it, smell it, hear it, or taste it. You can come into contact with carbon monoxide gas at any time of the year, but it's most common during cold weather months.

Stopping a leak before it happens is the best way to prevent getting sick from carbon monoxide gas. Make sure your heating system and other gas, oil, wood, kerosene, or coal-burning appliances are working and properly vented. Have these items inspected by a professional each year before turning them on for the season. Having these items checked each year is an important step to take since the health and well-being of you and your family depend on it.

Carbon monoxide detectors are the only way to detect a CO gas leak. Battery-operated carbon monoxide detectors must be installed on every floor of your living space and near sleeping areas. Check CO detectors and fire alarms two times a year to make sure the batteries and the units are working properly. Easiest way to remember to do a safety check on these units is to do it at the same time you move the time forward or backwards for Daylight Savings.

Lesser known sources of carbon monoxide poisoning 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.

Know how to recognize the effects associated with CO poisoning. Don't be fooled. CO poisoning is a medical emergency and requires immediate medical assistance. If you suspect a carbon monoxide exposure, take immediate action:

1. If someone is unconscious or unresponsive, get him or her out of the house and call 9-1-1 right away.
2. Exit the house/building immediately. Do not waste time opening windows. This will delay your escape and cause you to breathe in even more dangerous fumes.
3. Contact your local fire department/energy provider.
4. Call the NJ Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 for immediate medical treatment advice. Do not waste time looking for information on the internet about carbon monoxide poisoning. Call us for fast, free, and accurate information.

New Jersey residents can reach their local poison control center, 24/7: Call (1-800-222-1222); Text (973-339-0702); Chat via [website](#). If someone is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up, or having a seizure; call 9-1-1. Contact the NJ Poison Control Center for questions, emergencies, and information regarding any potential poisoning exposure.

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

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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.

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