

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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Spread Thanks Not Germs Protect Family Members from Food Poisoning, Flu, and COVID-19

(New Jersey) – The holiday season is a treasured time of year with Thanksgiving as the official kickoff. Traditional holiday activities and indoor celebrations bring friends, families, and neighbors together to enjoy each other's company and share in home-cooked meals around the kitchen and dinner tables. This year's holiday season will be a struggle for many as COVID-19 has officially crashed traditional activities.

Over the last few weeks, New Jersey has recorded increasingly high numbers of COVID -19 cases and hospitalization across the state. The continued spike in COVID-19 numbers clearly signals the second wave of COVID-19 has arrived in New Jersey and is here to stay for the foreseeable future. As the holidays near, government and public health officials urge families to choose [safer ways](#) to celebrate. Traditional activities carry a high risk for spreading both COVID-19 and seasonal flu germs.

You must consider your individual and family's risk of getting or spreading COVID-19 during in-person gatherings. Travelling to see family or having out of state visitors is dangerous to your health and your family's health. Holiday gatherings should only include immediate members of your household (people you live with) as long as these members are consistently taking precautions to lower their risk of getting or spreading COVID19. With community spread being so high, there is a very good chance that someone at your gathering will unknowingly pass coronavirus to the entire group.

"The holidays are an exciting time of year, but this year there's an increased risk of severe illness," says Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Department of Emergency Medicine](#). "Holiday gatherings can invite unwanted guests which can cause members to leave the table with more than full bellies. Be careful with food preparation as always, but also remember the guidelines to minimize the risk of COVID and the flu."

As family chefs prepare their Thanksgiving feast, they must remember to safely handle foods to prevent contamination while preparing, cooking, serving, and storing food. There are many germs (bacteria, viruses, parasites) lurking in kitchens that can spoil a holiday meal and cause severe illness in those who eat it the contaminated food. In New Jersey, indoor [Thanksgiving](#) gatherings are limited to 10 people this year. Consider decreasing the amount of food made to prevent having leftovers spoil.

Getting sick from eating contaminated food is quite common. Although anyone is susceptible to food poisoning, it is important to remember that the effects may be more serious for certain groups; young

children, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems. The effects of food poisoning are not always immediate and can range from mild to severe.

- Food poisoning is preventable. Follow these [four simple steps](#): Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill
- Food poisoning can happen just a few hours after consuming contaminated food.
- Some symptoms are nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhea, and fever.
- Foodborne germs (bacteria, parasites, viruses) can grow very quickly in foods left at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Do not prepare food if you are feeling sick or have any type of respiratory illness or infection.

Food poisoning can be serious. If at any time during the preparing/cooking process you are uncertain of something or think a food poisoning situation may have occurred, don't hesitate to get help from your local poison control center. Call 1-800-222-1222 for free, medical treatment advice and information, 24/7. If someone is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up, or having a seizure, call 9-1-1.

New Jersey residents: Call (1-800-222-1222); Text (973-339-0702); Chat via [website](#). Contact the NJ Poison Control Center for questions, emergencies, and information regarding lead or other poison-related 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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