

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

NEWS RELEASE

Media to contact:
800-222-1222

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Can Allergy Medicines Be Dangerous?

(New Jersey, NJ) – Spring is in full swing and so is allergy season. Millions of people suffer each year from allergies caused by pollen from grass, weeds, flowers, or trees. Allergy sufferers turn to over-the-counter and prescription allergy products for relief of common symptoms (sneezing, watery and itchy eyes, runny or stuffy nose, itchy throat, ears or sinuses, postnasal drip, cough). These products help relieve the discomfort of symptoms, but they can also cause side effects.

“All medicines have side effects associated with them even when they are taken appropriately and according to dosing directions on the label,” says Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Department of Emergency Medicine](#). “We want consumers to be aware of the potential side effects of over-the-counter and prescription allergy medicine which can range from agitation to drowsiness to stomach upset and liver damage.”

All medicines carry risk of harmful effects. Non-prescription medicines (over-the-counter) have the same potential for dangerous side effects, drug-to-drug interactions, and overdose as prescription medicines. Many mistakenly believe non-prescription drugs carry no risk because they can be bought without a prescription at a local retail store. This is not true. The poison control center’s medical professionals answer daily calls for help involving many over-the-counter products, including vitamins and supplements.

Anyone who takes medicines, including vitamins and supplements, is at risk for potentially harmful effects. Follow these safety tips to reduce your risk of injury when taking medicine (over-the-counter, prescription, vitamins, and supplements).

- **Select medicines that treat ONLY the symptoms you have.** For example, use a decongestant if you are congested, but only use decongestants with cough suppressant if you have a cough as well.
- **Be mindful that many medicines contain more than one ingredient, and some may even contain alcohol.** Many ingredients used in medicine can interact dangerously with alcohol causing side effects like nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, fainting, and/or loss of coordination. Keep in mind that these interactions can still occur even if they were not ingested at the same time.

- **Watch for the same active ingredients in products taken at the same time.** Many medicines contain the same active ingredients, even if they have different names and/or intended purposes. Taking these together, even if each is in the intended dose, can result in serious overdose.
- **More does not mean better.** Don't take medicines longer or in higher doses than the label recommends. If symptoms persist, it is time to see a doctor.
- **Many medicines make driving unsafe.** Many legal drugs, including allergy medicines, can affect a person's ability to drive safely. Many products cause side effects like sleepiness, loss of focus and attention, blurred vision, and decreased coordination, making it dangerous to drive a car, bus, train, plane, boat or operate machinery. "Drugged Driving" (driving under the influence of certain drugs/medicines) could get you in the same kind of trouble as driving under the influence of alcohol.
- **Be careful about dosage recommendations especially with children.** With liquid medicines, it is best to use a measuring spoon or dosing cup. It is unsafe to use a kitchen spoon to measure medicine.
- **Avoid adverse drug interactions.** Be extra cautious when taking more than one medicine (prescription, over-the-counter, or dietary supplement) at a time. Drug-to-drug interactions can cause serious health effects and death. Ask your pharmacist, healthcare provider, or the medical staff at the NJ Poison Control Center for help in choosing medicines that will not interact with the medicines you are already taking. The Poison Control Center provides medical advice to callers 24/7 – 1-800-222-1222.

New Jersey residents with poison-related questions or emergencies should call the poison center's Poison Help Hotline at 1-800-222-1222; Text (973-339-0702); Chat via the Poison Center's [website](#). Stay connected on social: [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#).

If someone is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up, or having a seizure, immediately call 9-1-1.

Help is Just a Phone Call Away!

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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