

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

## NEWS RELEASE

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Media to contact:  
800-222-1222

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### **Chlorine Tablet Shortage Can Lead to Unsafe Use of Products**

NJ Poison Control Center Concerned About Potential Injuries

**(New Jersey)** – Pool season is here, but with an unfortunate twist — high demand for chlorine in the midst of a nationwide shortage. Chlorine is a necessary but potentially dangerous chemical used to treat pool and hot tub water to prevent the growth of algae, bacteria, viruses, parasites and other germs. Being in water contaminated with germs is dangerous to your health. Untreated water can cause infections, illnesses and skin irritation, known as recreational water illnesses (RWIs).

The boom in home swimming pools and hot tubs began last year when the pandemic caused people to cancel travel plans and resort to staycations. “High demand for a chemical product with limited availability creates a perfect storm for accidental poisoning exposures and injuries,” says Bruce Ruck, managing director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Department of Emergency Medicine](#).

The NJ Poison Control Center is concerned and is warning consumers about the potential for serious side effects and injury from exposure to chlorine products – whether in tablet, powder, granular, or liquid form.

“Since chlorine is a common product, it’s easy to forget that it’s a strong chemical disinfectant that carries significant risk for serious health effects if accidentally exposed or misused,” says Ruck. “Chlorine in any form can cause eye irritation, breathing problems and lung injury if used in high concentrations or in poorly ventilated enclosed spaces.”

Every late spring and summer, the NJ Poison Control Center receives calls related to exposure to pool chemicals, most commonly chlorine. Although chlorine products should be kept in cool, dry, well-ventilated places, product containers and buckets are often left out in the heat and direct sun. When the chlorine containers are opened, a person can inhale the strong fumes and even get the chemical in their eyes, or splashed on their skin.

“As chlorine tablets continue to be in short supply, many will turn to alternative forms like powders, liquids and granules,” says Ruck. “Before using any product, read the directions on safe use and storage. When used according to their directions, pool chemical products are safe and effective.”

Keep chemicals in a lockable area to limit access to these potentially dangerous products, preventing accidental ingestions and exposures. Do not use chemical products manufactured for commercial use as these have higher chemical concentrations and are unsafe to use around people and pets.

“Do not mix chemicals together as this can have a deadly effect,” says Ruck. “Many chemicals when combined produce a toxic gas/fume that can make you sick and cause dangerous health effects. If you feel sick after using a chemical product, call your local poison control center right away as this could be a medical emergency.”

The NJ Poison Control Center offers the following tips.

- Do not swim while sick as bacteria and other germs can contaminate the water and make others 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.

If you have questions, concerns or an emergency regarding something potentially dangerous, contact the medical professionals at your local poison control center, 1-800-222-1222. Do not wait until symptoms occur or spend time looking for medical information online. Get the immediate medical help you or a loved one needs from your local poison control center. **If someone is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up, or having a seizure, call 9-1-1 immediately.**

New Jersey residents can reach their poison center in the following ways: Call the Poison Help Hotline

(1-800-222-1222), Text (973-339-0702), or [Chat](#) via the Poison Center's website. Stay connected on social: [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#)

**Help is Just a Phone Call Away!**

**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

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

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