

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

# NEWS RELEASE

Media to contact:  
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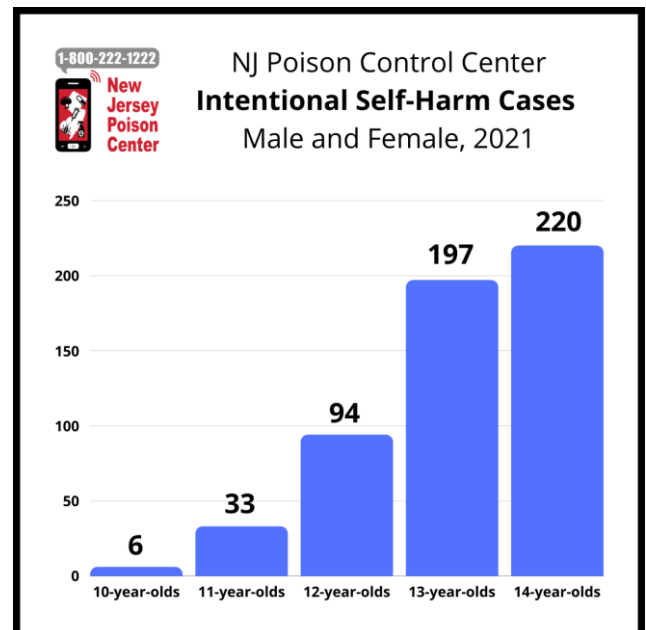
For Immediate Release

## Alarming Trend in New Jersey Dramatic Increase in Youth Self-Harm Attempts

**(New Jersey)** – What does an 11-year-old in North Jersey, a 13-year-old in South Jersey and a 16-year-old in Central Jersey have in common? All three New Jersey adolescents are sadly part of an alarming trend of intentional self-harm cases. Last year, the NJ Poison Control Center assisted in the medical management of over 1,500 suicide attempts in preteens and teens.

“We have a real public health crisis happening in our state as our data continues to show a steady rate of increase of children attempting to intentionally harm themselves,” says Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Department of Emergency Medicine](#).

This alarming trend in New Jersey began several years before the COVID-19 pandemic and cases have drastically increased through 2021. “Since New Jersey law does not require hospitals and healthcare facilities to report overdoses to the poison control center, our data likely captures only a portion of the self-harm attempts in our youth happening every day,” says Calello.



Most adults are unaware of the increase in cases of preteens and teens who have attempted self-harm in New Jersey. Mainstream media often reports only on the children who have died from suicide, not on those who attempted suicide. Many more youth attempt self-harm than die from self-harm. The sad truth is New Jersey children are attempting suicide at a rate which continues to increase.

“Our data should sound the alarm. If you’re a parent, coach, teacher or friend, talking to teens about identifying suicidal behaviors in peers is key. Often, a child will express suicidal thoughts to friends

through texts or social media before attempting to take their own life. Teaching our preteens and teens to speak up – right away – could be a critical life-saving intervention,” says Calello.

Household chemicals, medicines, and other common items in and around the home can pose a dangerous threat not only to young children but also older children/teens experiencing suicidal ideologies. Many household items, especially medicines, can have dangerous effects when used in the wrong way or in large quantities.

“Given our recent data combined with the known risk of [prescription drug abuse](#) among adolescents and young adults, it’s no longer enough to just keep home medicines up high and out of sight and reach,” says Bruce Ruck, managing director of the NJ Poison Control Center. “Preventing suicide attempts require adults to lock up home medicines after each use. Just because something is prescribed by a healthcare professional doesn’t mean it is safe.”

Key safety tips to prevent misuse or abuse of home medicines.

- Secure medicines. Lock them up to prevent access by adolescents and young adults.
- Only adults should give medicine. Children and adolescents should not self-medicate.
- Remove unused or expired medicines both prescription and non-prescription.
- Drop-off unneeded medicines at your local [medicine drop box](#). You can also drop off medicines during [DEA Drug Take Back Days](#) (every April and October).

If you think someone took too much medicine, contact your local poison control center immediately for medical treatment advice. Anyone can call for medical help – children, teens and adults. Poison control centers are a medical resource for both the public and health professionals. Get help 24/7.

**If the person is awake, call the NJ Poison Control Center 1-800-222-1222 or [Chat Here](#)**

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



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**Available for Media Interviews**

Diane 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, 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 or [Chat Here](#).

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#### **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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