

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

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Check Your Carbon Monoxide Detectors Ahead of Winter Weather Carbon Monoxide Gas Can Build Up Quickly Poisoning People and Pets

(New Jersey) – As a winter storm heads towards New Jersey, the state’s poison control center reminds residents about the increased danger of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning during intense winter storms. While preparing for dangerous weather conditions, test carbon monoxide detectors to make sure devices and batteries are working properly.

Breathing in carbon monoxide, often referred to as “the silent killer”, can quickly become life-threatening and must be treated as a medical emergency. If you suspect someone is experiencing symptoms of CO poisoning, it is important to get help as quickly as possible. The NJ Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222) should be contacted at the first sign of symptoms (similar to common winter illnesses). If someone is unconscious, not breathing, seizing or hard to wake-up, call 9-1-1.

“As communities around the state brace for heavy wind, rain, snow, ice, and possible power outages, the medical professionals at the NJ Poison Control Center are available to provide help and information before, during, and after the storm,” says Bruce Ruck, managing director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](#). “Each winter the poison center sees an uptick in calls for exposure and/or injury to a wide range of substances related to dangerous weather, especially carbon monoxide.”

Carbon monoxide is a dangerous, poisonous gas that causes mild to severe illness to hundreds of people in New Jersey each year. Severe illness requires hospitalization and can result in death. Carbon monoxide is produced by portable generators, stoves, dryers, furnaces, and other fuel burning appliances and equipment, including space heaters and cars. The gas gives no warning, meaning you can’t see it, smell it, hear it, or taste it. The **only** way to detect CO in your living area is to have properly working carbon monoxide detectors.

“While CO poisoning is a concern regardless of weather conditions or time of year, we always see an increase in exposure to carbon monoxide during the winter, especially when we have dangerous weather,” says Ruck. “Using the stove to heat the house, charging phones in running cars in enclosed/poorly ventilated spaces or surrounded by snow, and using any gas-powered appliances/equipment like generators or space heaters can cause dangerous levels of carbon monoxide to build up very quickly.”

There is no safe level of carbon monoxide, anyone (including pets) exposed to this poisonous gas can experience life-threatening health effects.

Recognize the signs and symptoms of CO poisoning and act quickly! Early symptoms of CO poisoning are similar to symptoms of the common cold, flu, strep throat, and COVID-19. Symptoms can include headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. At high levels, CO poisoning causes unconsciousness (coma) and death.

Stopping carbon monoxide gas from building up inside your living space or car is the best way to prevent dangerous health effects.

If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, get help immediately:

1. If someone is unconscious or unresponsive, get them out of the house and call 9-1-1 immediately.
2. Leave the house or building right away. 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 or energy provider.
4. Call the NJ Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 for immediate treatment advice. Do not waste time looking for information on the internet about carbon monoxide poisoning. Call the poison center for fast, free, and accurate information.

Safety tips to help reduce your risk of carbon monoxide exposure during snow storms:

Outdoors

- Gas generators should only be used outside. Keep portable generators more than 20 feet from both your home and your neighbors' homes. This includes keeping generators away from doors, windows, and vents. [Generator Safety Tips](#)
- Clear snow blocking/around your heating system, dryer, and other appliance vents, intakes, and exhausts.
- Make sure flues are open before starting a fire in your fireplace.
- Use pressure washers, grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices outdoors only. It is never safe to use them inside your home, basement, garage, carport, camper, boat cabin, or tent.
- Do not idle a vehicle in a snowbank. Before starting the vehicle, clear the tailpipe and surrounding area to prevent exhaust fumes from entering the car.

Indoors

- Carbon monoxide detectors should be on every level of your home, including near sleeping areas.
- Check batteries in CO detectors and make sure the devices are working properly. If detectors are old or not working properly, replace them before the storm.
- Keeping a car running in a garage is extremely dangerous. Carbon monoxide gas can quickly build up inside the garage even with the garage door open.

- You must not use your stove or oven to heat your living space. Doing so can cause dangerous levels of carbon monoxide gas to build up inside your home or apartment.
- Be careful with “remote start” engines which may turn on without you knowing it.

If you think someone was exposed to carbon monoxide, contact your local poison control center immediately. Medical specialists are available to provide information, answer questions, and provide emergency support 24 hours a day. Anyone can call for medical help – children, teens, and adults. Poison control centers are a medical resource for both the public and healthcare providers.

Call the NJ Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 or [Chat Here](#)

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



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.