

The New Jersey Poison Control Center — Serving New Jersey Since 1983

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Media to contact:

800-222-1222

800-962-1253 if outside NJ

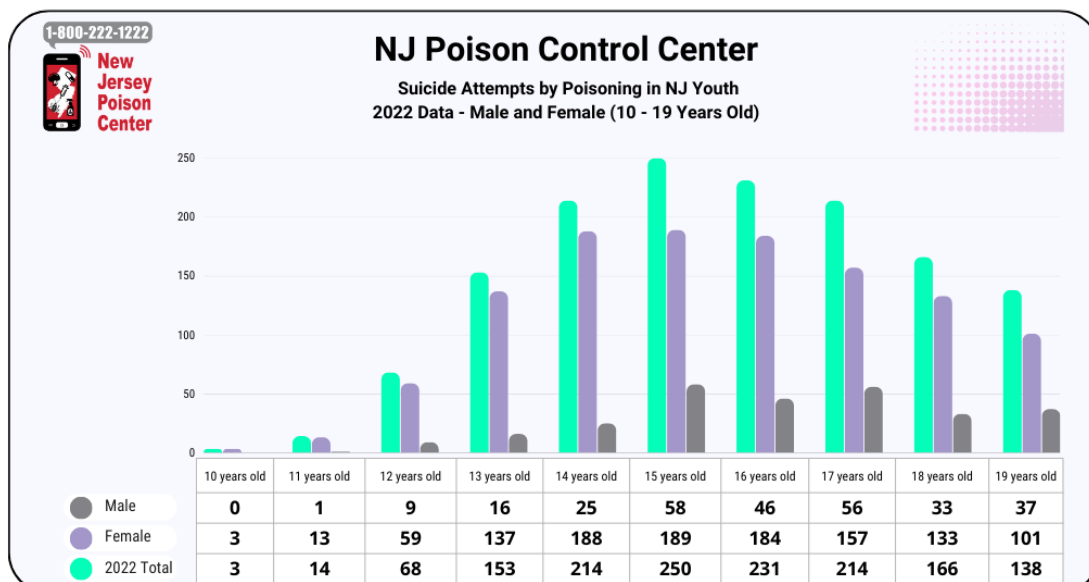
State’s Poison Center Data Shows Suicide Attempts are High in Teens

Young Females Often Choose Medication to Attempt Suicide

(New Jersey) – Potential poisons can be found in every home. Household chemicals, medicines, and other common items pose a risk of both unintentional (accidental) poisoning and intentional poisoning (suicide attempts). Medicines, whether prescription or nonprescription, can be a lethal means of self-harm for a [person at risk of suicide](#).

Calls to assist adolescents and young adults who have attempted suicide by poisoning is a daily occurrence at the NJ Poison Control Center. Often the specialists at the poison center assist with multiple cases of youth suicide attempts at the same time. For example, a 14-year-old teen was sent into an emergency room by a poison center specialist after ingesting an unknown amount of her relative’s medicine. At the same time, another poison center specialist assisted a doctor with the medical management of an unconscious teen who ingested several over-the-counter (nonprescription) products.

In 2022, the NJ Poison Control Center was called to assist in the medical management of over 1,400 poisoning-related suicide attempts by youth — preteens, teens, and young adults. Nine hundred and thirty-three (933) of the over 1,400 cases involved children 16 years old and younger.



“Suicide in preteens is becoming more and more common, signaling an increasing public health concern.” Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](#). “Females are more likely than males to choose poisoning as a lethal means of self-harm. Last year, young females accounted for 80 percent of the poison control center’s total youth suicide attempt cases. This means that for every five suicide attempt cases we had in 2022, four of them involved young females.”

Since New Jersey law does not require hospitals and other healthcare facilities to report poison-related suicide attempts to the state’s poison control center, the center’s data captures only a snapshot of the true scope of this devastating public health crisis.

Most people don’t realize how common it is for adolescents and young adults to have suicidal ideations (thoughts or ideas) or attempt lethal means of self-harm. These instances are often only reported or discussed when someone has died. Unfortunately, the reality is that many more adolescents and young adults attempt lethal self-harm than die.

“Given our recent data combined with the known risk of [prescription drug abuse](#) among adolescents and young adults, it’s no longer safe enough for adults to just keep medicines up high and out of sight and reach,” says Bruce Ruck, managing director of the NJ Poison Control Center. “A common risk factor for suicide is having access to lethal means of self-harm. Reducing access to medicines at home does save lives, so it’s critical to lock up medicines after each use.”

If you are a parent, coach, teacher, or friend, talking to teens about identifying suicidal behaviors in peers is key. Often, an adolescent or young adult will express suicidal ideations to friends through texts or social media before attempting to use a lethal means of self-harm. Teaching youth to speak up – right away – can be a critical life-saving intervention for a person at risk of suicide.

Safe storage of medicine is key to preventing suicide attempts. Just because a medicine is prescribed by a healthcare provider or bought without a prescription, does not mean it is safe.

Key safety tips to help prevent misuse or abuse of medicines (prescription or nonprescription).

- Secure medicines. Lock them up to prevent access by adolescents and young adults
- Monitor medicines. Know which prescription and nonprescription medicines you have. Regularly check pill quantities. Pay attention to how often prescription medicines are being refilled.
- Only adults should give medicine. Children and adolescents should not self-medicate.
- Remove unused or expired medicines.

- 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 has come in contact with something dangerous, 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 healthcare providers. Get help 24/7 — NJPoisonCenter.org

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



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](#).
Stay Connected: [FB](#) / [Twitter](#) / [Instagram](#) / [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.

###