

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 (outside NJ)

Carbon Monoxide: The Silent Killer

Poisonous Gas is a Hidden Danger for Travelers

Warning: Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning can cause sudden illness and death in any season. Heating appliances and other equipment that burn carbon-based fuel, such as gas or wood, are a common source of accidental CO poisoning at lodging and rental facilities.

(New Jersey) – Sadly, it’s not uncommon to hear of the tragic deaths of travelers caused by accidental carbon monoxide poisoning (CO). In a [recent incident](#), two Americans vacationing in Mexico died in their hotel room from suspected CO poisoning.

Accidental CO-related illness and death from faulty or improperly vented fuel-powered heaters, appliances, and other equipment can occur anywhere — private homes, guest houses, commercial facilities (resorts, hotels, motels, inns), and residential-type rentals/Airbnb (condos, apartments, guest rooms, hostels).

“Carbon monoxide poisoning is a hidden danger commonly overlooked, especially in warm-weather months,” says Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](#). “This poisonous gas is invisible, so you don’t realize you’re breathing in the deadly fumes.”

CO poisoning gives no warning, you can’t see, smell, hear, or taste it. Dangerous levels of CO can build up quickly in spaces, poisoning anyone breathing in the fumes, including pets. Although many people die each year from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning, more visit emergency departments for CO-related illness.

Pool heaters at lodging and rental facilities are a common source of carbon monoxide poisoning. This gas is impossible to detect without working CO detectors. When making reservations, ask about the facility’s carbon monoxide detector policy. To prevent CO poisoning, detectors should be installed inside facilities and rental properties.

If CO detectors are not installed, consider staying at another lodging or rental facility. Also consider bringing a personal CO monitor/detector with you when traveling. These personal monitoring devices are often worn by firefighters and emergency medical service professionals to prevent CO poisoning.

“Poisoning from carbon monoxide is hard to recognize, which is why it can often be misdiagnosed,” says Calello. “If feeling sick, it’s important to pay careful attention to the signs and symptoms you may be feeling.”

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning may include headache, dizziness, weakness, tiredness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. Early symptoms of CO poisoning can be confused with symptoms of viral infections (the common cold, flu, and COVID-19), food poisoning, motion sickness, and anxiety.

Carbon monoxide poisoning should be seriously considered if your symptoms improve when you leave the pool area or room, or if others around you, including [pets](#), experience similar symptoms. CO poisoning is a medical emergency that requires you to act quickly. If you’re feeling sick, everyone including pets, should leave the area immediately and get medical help.

If a person or pet has come in contact with carbon monoxide, follow these steps and get help right away. Poison control centers are a medical resource for the public and healthcare professionals. Get fast, free, expert medical help, 24/7.

1. If a person is not breathing or hard to wake up, get them out of the area and call 9-1-1. If a pet was exposed to CO, contact a veterinarian or animal hospital.
2. Get out of the area immediately. The longer you breathe in poisonous fumes, the more severe the health effects.
3. Contact the local fire department or emergency medical services. If you’re staying at lodging facility, contact the front desk.
4. If you’re staying in a U.S state or territory, call the local poison control center at 1-800-222-1222 for immediate, medical treatment advice. Do not waste time “Googling” what to do.

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

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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 or [Chat Here](#).

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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