



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

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Always Check Medicine Labels for Active Ingredients

Accidental Overdose is a Serious Risk During “Sniffle Season”

(New Jersey) – Many people turn to over-the-counter (OTC or nonprescription) medicines to treat their cold, flu, COVID-19, or pain symptoms. OTC products can be bought without a prescription at local convenience stores, pharmacies, supermarkets, and online. However, having so many options available can often lead to confusion when it comes to choosing the right product for symptom relief.

“It’s essential to recognize that while over-the-counter medicines are widely available and commonly used, there can be a false sense of safety regarding the risk of dangerous adverse effects, including the potential for overdose,” said Bruce Ruck, managing director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](http://NJPoisonCenter.org) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](http://RutgersNewJerseyMedicalSchool.edu). People of all ages are at risk of serious health effects from taking too much medicine, especially children and older adults.

Two commonly used active ingredients found in many prescription and over-the-counter medicines, namely acetaminophen (found in Tylenol) and ibuprofen (found in Advil), are frequently used to treat winter illness symptoms and pain. When used according to the directions on the label, and not more than the maximum daily dose, these medicines are safe and effective.

However, it’s important to note that taking too much of either of these medicines, either alone or in combination with other medicines, can result in unexpected harmful effects, including organ failure and death. According to the FDA (U.S. Food & Drug Association), acetaminophen is found in over 600 OTC and prescription medicines.

“It can be easy to give or take more acetaminophen or ibuprofen than intended, especially when using over-the-counter multi-symptom cold and flu medicines,” said Ruck. “Be careful when using more than one medicine to treat symptoms.” Most people are unaware that many multi-symptom products use acetaminophen or ibuprofen as one of their active ingredients.

The medical providers at the New Jersey Poison Control Center can help callers of all ages understand which medicines would best to help their symptoms or provide medical treatment advice if someone consumed too much medicine.

Safety tips to avoid an accidental overdose with cold and flu medicines:

- Always check the active ingredients when taking more than one medicine for symptoms. This will prevent doubling up on active ingredients.
- Never take more than the recommended maximum daily dose.
- Only use products that treat the symptoms you currently have.
- Avoid drinking alcohol while taking prescription or OTC medicines.
- Only use a dosing tool such as a medicine spoon, dropper, syringe, or cup when measuring liquid medicine. Do not use a kitchen soup spoon to measure medicine because the dose will not be accurate.
- Children should only be given medicine specifically formulated for them and never more than the maximum daily dose. Never give children medicine that is made for adults.
- Infants and young children must only be given medicine according to their weight, not their age.
- If you have questions about dosing, active ingredients, warnings, and potentially dangerous interaction, call the New Jersey Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 (Poison Help line).

If you think someone consumed too much acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or other medicine, contact the New Jersey Poison Control Center immediately for medical treatment advice. Anyone can call for help – children, teens, and adults. Poison control centers are a medical resource for both the public and healthcare professionals. Get help 24/7 — Call 1-800-222-1222 or [Chat Here](#). If someone is not breathing, hard to wake up, or having a seizure, call 9-1-1.

Stay Connected: [FB](#) | [X](#) | [Instagram](#) | [TikTok](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Website](#)

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 Health 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.