

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

HEALTH ADVISORY

Portable Generators Can Cause Deadly Carbon Monoxide to Build Up Quickly in Homes

State's poison control center warns residents about carbon monoxide poisoning ahead of possible power outages from stormy weather.

Last week a string of strong thunderstorms across New Jersey left some residents without power. Many relied on their portable generators until the electric companies were able to restore power to those areas.

As we head into another round of soggy and stormy weather over the next few days, the New Jersey Poison Control Center warns residents about the risk of being exposed to carbon monoxide (CO) from the exhaust fumes of fuel-powered generators.

"Carbon monoxide poisoning is one of the hidden hazards that worry us here at the poison control center during and after storms," said Bruce Ruck, managing director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](http://NJPoisonCenter.org) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](http://RutgersNewJerseyMedicalSchool.org). "Carbon monoxide is a deadly gas, and people and pets are often accidentally exposed to it when fuel-powered generators are placed in unsafe places. Since carbon monoxide gives no warning, it's important to regularly test your CO detectors at home to make sure they are working."

To prevent unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning, keep running generators outdoors only. Because fuel-powered equipment produces carbon monoxide, they should never be used indoors under any circumstance. Dangerous levels of carbon monoxide can build up quickly inside areas poisoning anyone exposed to it.

Recognize the signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and act quickly. Carbon monoxide poisoning is a medical emergency. Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can be mistaken for symptoms of common illnesses like colds, flu or COVID-19. Symptoms may include headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. If symptoms improve when you go outside, consider carbon monoxide poisoning a possibility.

The only way to detect carbon monoxide in your home, is to have working carbon monoxide detectors. If a carbon monoxide detector sounds its alarm, do not ignore it because it's trying to save your life. Carbon monoxide detectors don't malfunction as often as people may think. Get everyone including pets out to fresh air immediately. "Every minute counts in situations involving carbon monoxide," said Ruck. "Contact the poison center for personalized, medical guidance and care."

It is unsafe to idle your car in the garage even with the garage door open. If you need to charge your phone, pull your vehicle completely out of the garage with the tailpipe/exhaust facing away from the home before idling.

To reduce your risk of being exposed to carbon monoxide during storms, the New Jersey Poison Control Center offers the following safety information.

If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, get help immediately:

1. If someone is unconscious or unresponsive (hard to wake or not breathing), 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 New Jersey Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 for fast, medical advice. Do not waste time looking for information on the internet about carbon monoxide poisoning.

Outdoors

- Generators should only be used outside, never indoors.
- Keep 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](#)
- 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.

Indoors

- Carbon monoxide detectors should be on every level of your home, including near sleeping areas.
- Check to make sure your carbon monoxide detectors are working. If detectors are old or not working properly, replace them.
- Keeping a car running in a garage is extremely dangerous. Carbon monoxide gas can quickly build up inside the car and garage even with the garage door open.
- Be careful with "remote start" engines which may turn on without you knowing, causing the car to idle in the garage.

If you think someone was exposed to carbon monoxide, contact the New Jersey Poison Control Center immediately for medical guidance and care. Anyone can call for help – children, teens and adults. Poison control centers are a medical resource for both the public and healthcare providers. Get help 24/7 — Call 1-800-222-1222 or [Chat Online](#). 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 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.

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