

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

HEALTH ADVISORY

New School Year Brings Concerns About Exposure to Potential Poisons

The start of the school year is a frantic time for families and teachers, getting back on schedule and navigating the morning rush – a time when people might not be paying attention to situations where unintentional poisonings could occur.

“September is not only a busy time for families and school employees, it’s also a busy time for us at the poison center,” said Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](http://NJPoisonCenter.org) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](http://RutgersNewJerseyMedicalSchool.edu). “Potentially dangerous products are commonly found in our everyday environments and often go unnoticed until a mishap occurs. Situations can become dangerous quickly and without warning depending on the dose of a product.”

As with households, classrooms contain substances that are harmful if ingested or used incorrectly, including medicines, cleaning chemicals and disinfectants, look-alike products, school and craft supplies, hand sanitizers, food, disc batteries and small magnets.

“When you combine distraction with easy access and unsafe storage of potentially harmful products, mishaps are likely to happen,” said Calello. “Every day, people of all ages are exposed to potentially dangerous items ranging from medicines and chemicals to adult recreational products and substances of abuse.”

When it comes to giving medicine to children, parents and caregivers should have a clear understanding as to what medicine a child needs, when and how much needs to be given and who is responsible for giving the medicine.

Calling the poison control center (800-222-1222) first for medical guidance and care, including determining if any further medical action is needed, can make a difference between a mild health effect and a more serious one, which may result in a trip to the hospital, Calello adds.

While some calls to the poison center are fairly routine, others involving prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and supplements, highly caffeinated energy drinks, and adult recreational drugs including vape liquids, cannabis edibles and alcohol can be quite complicated and result in serious side effects.

Younger children are not the only ones at risk for poisonings. Social media challenges, bullying and look-alike products can pose serious health risks for older children and teens. Potentially dangerous situations can include inhaling toxic fumes from a spray can for a challenge, taking a large dose of an over-the-counter pain reliever to harm oneself, mistakenly eating cannabis edibles thought to be candy, or taking fake prescription pills from a friend or bought online.

"The poison center is not only a trusted medical resource for parents and caregivers, but also school administrators, teachers, and nurses," said Calello. "With the poison center's help, most people don't have to go to the emergency room or seek other medical services."

The New Jersey Poison Control Center recommends the following safety tips to prevent children of all ages from coming in contact with potential poisons at home and school.

- Store all medicines, household cleaners, and adult recreational substances such as alcohol or cannabis edibles in their original containers and in secure or locked areas. These products can cause serious side effects in children. Cannabis edibles can be mistaken for candy and other food products.
- When giving a child more than one medicine, make sure the medicines do not have the same active ingredients. Only give young children medicine formulated for children.
- Measure liquid medicine with an oral syringe or medicine spoon, cup or dropper. Never use a kitchen soup spoon because it is not a true measure for a teaspoon or tablespoon.
- Keep track of medicines in the home to prevent accidental exposure, misuse, or abuse. Both prescription and over-the-counter medicines should be locked up after every use to ensure they are not accidentally or intentionally ingested or stolen.
- Give young children limited, monitored access to hand sanitizer. Don't keep it in their backpacks or lunch bags. Hand sanitizers can be dangerous if enough is swallowed.
- School supplies should be non-toxic and kept in their original containers, whether provided by the school or brought in by students and parents. Look for the [AP](#)

[\(Approved Product\) seal](#) from ACMI (Art and Creative Materials Institute) on the packaging which certifies products to be non-toxic and safe for kids.

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before touching food and after interacting with others to prevent illnesses. Wash food preparation surfaces.
- Pack lunch foods in insulated containers to prevent food from spoiling and causing illness. Keep hot foods hot by using thermoses and other insulated containers. Cold food should be kept cold by using ice packs or cooling bags.
- Watch children outdoors. Many potential poisons hide in plain sight including toxic wild mushrooms, lawn and garden chemicals, pest control products and poisonous plants like poison ivy and poison hemlock.
- Read warnings and follow the directions on product labels. Avoid using multiple cleaners at the same time as the combination of ingredients can cause toxic fumes.

For more information on safely using cleaning chemicals in the classroom, visit [here](#)

If you think someone came in contact with something dangerous, contact the New Jersey 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 — Call 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 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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