

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

HEALTH ADVISORY

Trick-or-Treat Safety

Don't Let Halloween End in a Nightmare

Although Halloween is a time filled with exciting and fun activities, it's a busy time for everyone, including the state's poison control center. Each year, about [35 million](#) children in the United States trick-or-treat on Halloween night, [3,200](#) people go to the emergency department on Halloween for injuries and [46%](#) of those are under the age of 18.

With people preoccupied preparing for school parades, parties, and trunk/trick-or-treating, paying attention to what's happening around them can be hard. It's important to remember potential poisons hide in plain sight in our everyday environments. Any product or substance, legal or illegal, can be poisonous if used in the wrong way, the wrong amount (dose), or by the wrong person.

In the past, the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](#) assisted in the medical care of Halloween-related cases ranging from a toddler who was admitted to the hospital with severe nausea, vomiting and difficulty breathing from ingesting cannabis (marijuana) edibles found in his babysitter's coat pocket to a parent who suffered injuries from mishandling and incorrectly storing dry ice.

"Halloween-related mishaps and accidents involving potential poisons go beyond the fear of contaminated candy," says Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the New Jersey Poison Control Center at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. "Our medical professionals get calls throughout the night about many things — from glow sticks to face paint; allergic reactions to food poisoning; belly aches to cannabis edibles; and chemical burns to alcohol poisoning."

The state's poison control center is on alert each October because of the increased risk of mistaking potentially dangerous products for Halloween candy at home. These products can fool anyone, not just kids and pets. Prescription and over-the-counter (non-prescription) medicines are not the only products easily confused with candy. [Cannabis edibles](#) can be confusing since they look like candy and other sweets that do not contain THC (the active substance in cannabis that makes a person feel "high").

Poison center experts and other health and safety officials understand that it is highly unlikely someone would intentionally give out cannabis edibles to children on Halloween. What's more likely to happen, especially with Halloween candy and edibles around homes, is a child accidentally finds and eats an

edible thinking it is candy meant for trick-or-treating. To prevent accidental exposure to edibles, treat edibles like medicine. Keeping them locked away, out of sight and reach of children and pets.

As of September 2024, the New Jersey Poison Control Center assisted in the medical treatment of more than 100 children ages 5 and younger who were accidentally exposed to cannabis edibles.

Be alert to food allergies. About [4 million children](#) in the U.S. are allergic to foods such as peanuts, wheat, milk, tree nuts or eggs. Many children may have severe reactions to these ingredients. If your child has a food allergy, monitor the candy and other treats they get while trick-or-treating. Parents of children with food allergies can reference the [Teal Pumpkin Project website](#) to find out which homes are food-allergy friendly and giving out nonfood items on Halloween.

If planning a party, make sure children and pets don't get into alcoholic beverages. The amount of alcohol in beer, wine, liquor, and cocktails/punches affects children and pets differently than adults. Even swallowing a small amount of alcohol can cause serious health effects and death.

It's easy to overindulge without realizing you've consumed too much alcohol. A person who appears to be very drunk or has passed out may be showing early signs of alcohol poisoning and be in real danger. Immediate medical help is essential. "Sleeping it off" is never a safe option. It's important to know the [critical signs](#) of alcohol poisoning.

Pets are not only at risk of alcohol poisoning, they're also at risk of poisoning from candies, chocolates, and other [Halloween-related items](#). Chocolate, cocoa, candy, and anything sugarless can be poisonous to pets. [Artificial sweeteners](#) like [xylitol](#) (also called wood sugar, birch sugar, and birch bark extract) can cause severe illness if pets eat products containing this ingredient. Keep dangerous products up high and out of sight and reach of pets. If any of these items are swallowed, get help fast. Call a veterinarian or visit an animal hospital if a pet has ingested something dangerous.

The New Jersey Poison Control Center offers the following safety tips to prevent potentially dangerous mishaps while celebrating Halloween.

- Avoid homemade treats when trick-or-treating.
- Teach kids that medicine is not candy. Lock up medicines to prevent accidental poisoning.
- Use non-toxic makeup to paint faces and body parts. Test on a small area of skin to be sure it will not cause an allergic reaction.
- Dry ice can cause severe burns and frostbite if it touches the skin or is swallowed. Use gloves to protect your skin.
- Look out for potentially dangerous products that look like candy.
- [Safety Video](#)

When a mishap occurs involving a potentially dangerous product or substance, many people call 9-1-1 or spend hours in the emergency room when they could have called the New Jersey Poison Control Center for medical help. Calling the Poison Help line is the fastest way to get the help or information you need to prevent further injury. Anyone can call the poison control center for help – children, teens, and adults. 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.

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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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