

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

## HEALTH ADVISORY

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### **‘Tis the Season for Safety and Holiday Cheer**

The holiday season is upon us, and with it comes a never-ending “to-do” list that only seems to grow as the days count down to the holiday celebrations. Although this is a wonderful time of year, the hectic nature of the holiday season often distracts people from paying attention to what’s happening around them, especially in their homes and when visiting others.

“Whether you’re traveling or hosting this year, accidental mishaps involving potential dangers are expected to happen, especially when many hide in plain sight,” said Bruce Ruck, managing director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](http://NJPoisonCenter.org) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](http://Rutgers.edu).

Potential poisons can be found in every home – from holiday decorations to children’s toys and foods to adult recreational products, including alcohol, psychedelic mushrooms and cannabis (marijuana) edibles.

“The dangers of some hazards like cleaning products and medicines are well known,” Ruck said.

“However, other hazards like carbon monoxide, button batteries and small magnets hide unsuspectingly in homes. It only takes seconds for common, everyday items to go from safe to dangerous.”

Keep the holidays merry and bright. Follow the safety tips below to prevent accidental injury.

- Give guests a safe space to keep potentially dangerous items, including marijuana edibles, medicines, vapes and nicotine products and hand sanitizers. Guests can lock these items in their luggage or a lockable drawer, cabinet or closet.
- Use caution with antique ornaments and those not made in the United States. These items may be decorated with harmful lead paint.
- Don’t burn wrapping paper, foil, garland or tinsel. Inhaling the fumes can be harmful.
- Decorate with plants that aren’t poisonous if you have young kids or pets.
- Many flavored baking extracts contain high amounts of alcohol, the same alcohol found in liquor, wine and beer. Keep extracts out of sight and reach of kids and pets.

- Snow spray should only be used in areas with good air circulation to prevent inhaling potentially harmful fumes. Keep this product away from flames.
- [Carbon monoxide](#) (CO) kills hundreds of people every year and makes thousands sick. Have working CO detectors on every level of your home. If the CO alarm sounds at any time, leave immediately and call for help when outside. If you have questions about carbon monoxide poisoning, call the Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222 to reach the New Jersey Poison Control Center. If traveling out of the U.S., consider packing a portable CO detector. Some countries don't require hotels and other vacation rentals to have CO detectors.
- Keep household items with lithium button batteries (or coin batteries) and small magnets out of sight and reach of children and pets. Batteries and magnets are choking hazards and can cause serious and irreversible damage to internal organs.
- Alcohol poisoning can cause serious illness and lasting health effects. Know how much alcohol you are drinking. Empty unfinished alcoholic drinks, especially holiday cocktails, eggnog and punches to prevent kids and pets from accidentally drinking alcohol. These drinks are sweet-smelling and will get the attention of children and pets.
- Use simple [food safety steps](#) to prevent food poisoning, which can cause severe illness. Cooking foods to the right temperature kills germs and prevents people from getting sick. Use a food thermometer to check that foods are cooked to a safe internal temperature.
- Although water-absorbing gel beads are not toxic, they are extremely dangerous to anyone at risk of swallowing them or sticking them in the ear or nose, especially young children, people with developmental disabilities, people with dementia and pets. These products expand to dangerous sizes in the body, causing choking and life-threatening blockages or ruptures of internal organs.
- Keep items dangerous to pets up high and out of sight and reach – chocolate, candy, products containing xylitol (a sugar substitute that may be described as wood sugar, birch sugar and birch bark), bread, dough, fatty meat scraps, raisins, currants, alcohol, medicine and recreational and illegal drugs. These items can cause serious health effects and death.

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 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**

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](http://njms.rutgers.edu).

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