

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

HEALTH ADVISORY

Serving Safety This Season: Food Safety and Holiday Tips You Need to Know

The holiday season is filled with family, food, and fun—but it can also bring unexpected dangers. From foodborne illness (also known as food poisoning) to hidden household hazards, the New Jersey Poison Control Center reminds families to take simple precautions to keep loved ones healthy and safe during the celebrations.

"Holiday meal prep can be stressful, and mistakes happen," says Diane Caello, MD, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](http://NJPoisonCenter.org) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](http://RutgersHealth.org). From thawing your turkey to storing leftovers, small actions make a big difference in preventing illness."

Food safety remains a top concern during holiday gatherings. Common mistakes include undercooking the turkey, leaving food out too long at room temperature, cross-contamination, and overlooking the food allergies of guests. Follow these steps:

- **Clean, Separate, Cook, Chill:** Wash hands and surfaces, keep raw meats, poultry, and seafood separate from other foods to prevent cross-contamination, cook to safe internal temperatures, and refrigerate quickly.
- **Avoid the Danger Zone:** Never leave perishable foods out for more than two hours. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- **Handle Turkey Safely:** Allow turkey to fully defrost, do not rinse raw turkey, cook stuffing separately to a safe internal temperature of 165°F, and use a food thermometer to ensure foods reach safe cooking temperatures.
- **Store Leftovers Correctly:** Refrigerate leftovers within two hours of cooking or serving and reheat food to at least 165°F.

Everyone is at risk of foodborne poisoning, but young children, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to get sick from eating foods contaminated with bacteria and other germs.

"Beyond the kitchen, hidden hazards lurk in holiday homes," adds Bruce Ruck, managing director of the New Jersey Poison Control Center. "Items like water beads, button batteries, and nicotine products can

cause serious harm if swallowed. Pets and kids are curious—keep dangerous products up and away, out of sight and reach."

If you're feeling under the weather, skip the kitchen. Anyone sick with a respiratory illness like a cold, the flu, RSV, or COVID-19 should not prepare, cook, or serve food. Germs from sick people can spread to foods and drinks, increasing the risk of others becoming sick.

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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