

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

HEALTH ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

January 23, 2026

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Warning During Snowstorm

Carbon Monoxide Gas Can Build Up Quickly, Poisoning People and Pets

The state of New Jersey and the region is preparing for a major winter storm this weekend. With significant amounts of accumulating snow, the state's poison control center reminds residents about the increased danger of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning during intense winter storms.

Breathing in carbon monoxide, often referred to as “the silent killer,” can quickly become life-threatening and must be treated as a medical emergency. If you suspect someone is experiencing symptoms of CO poisoning, it is important to get help as quickly as possible. The New Jersey Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222) should be contacted at the first sign of symptoms (similar to common winter illnesses). If someone is unconscious, not breathing, seizing or hard to wake, call 9-1-1.

“Depending on where you live, you may experience heavy wind, snow, ice, and possible power outages,” said Bruce Ruck, managing director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](http://NJPoisonCenter.org) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](http://RutgersNewJerseyMedicalSchool.org). “It is important for people to be aware of the increased risk of exposure to carbon monoxide poisoning during and after winter storms. Our medical providers at the poison control center are available 24/7 to provide medical help and guidance to people right where they are. Each winter, the poison center sees an uptick in calls for exposures and injuries to a wide range of potential poisons related to dangerous weather, including antifreeze, ice melting products, and carbon monoxide.”

Carbon monoxide is a dangerous, poisonous gas that causes mild to severe illness to hundreds of people in New Jersey each year. Severe illness requires hospitalization and can result in death. Carbon monoxide is produced by portable generators, stoves, dryers, furnaces, and other fuel burning appliances and equipment, including space heaters and cars. The gas gives no warning, meaning you can't see it, smell it, hear it, or taste it. The **only** way to detect CO in your living area is to have properly working carbon monoxide detectors.

“While CO poisoning is a concern regardless of weather conditions or time of year, we always see an increase in exposure to carbon monoxide during the winter, especially when we have

dangerous weather,” said Ruck. “Using the stove to heat the house, charging phones in running cars in enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces or surrounded by snow, or using any gas-powered appliances or equipment like portable generators or space heaters can cause dangerous levels of carbon monoxide to build up very quickly.”

There is no safe level of carbon monoxide for anyone, including pets. Exposure to this poisonous gas can experience life-threatening health effects.

Recognize the signs and symptoms of CO poisoning and act quickly. Early symptoms of CO poisoning are similar to symptoms of the common cold, flu and COVID-19. Symptoms can include headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. At high levels, CO poisoning causes unconsciousness (coma) and death.

Stopping carbon monoxide gas from building up inside your living space or car is the best way to prevent dangerous health effects.

If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, get help immediately:

1. If someone is unconscious or unresponsive, 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 immediate treatment advice. Do not waste time looking for information on the internet about carbon monoxide poisoning. Call the poison center for fast, free, and accurate information.

Safety tips to help reduce your risk of carbon monoxide exposure during snowstorms:

Outdoors

- Gas generators should only be used outside. Keep portable 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](#))
- Clear snow blocking and around your heating system, dryer and other appliance vents, intakes, and exhausts.
- Make sure flues are open before starting a fire in your fireplace.
- If the power goes out, do not use grills, camp stoves or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside. It is never safe to use them inside your home, basement, garage, carport, camper, boat cabin, or tent. Carbon monoxide can build up quickly in these spaces.
- Do not idle a vehicle in a snowbank. Before starting the vehicle, clear the tailpipe and surrounding area to prevent exhaust fumes from entering the car.

Indoors

- Carbon monoxide detectors should be on every level of your home, including the basement and near sleeping areas.
- Check batteries in CO detectors and make sure the devices are working properly. If detectors are old or not working properly, replace them as soon as possible.
- Keeping a car running in a garage is extremely dangerous. Carbon monoxide gas can quickly build up inside the garage even with the garage door open.
- Do not use your stove or oven to heat your living space. Doing so can cause dangerous levels of carbon monoxide gas to build up inside your home or apartment.
- Be careful with “remote start” engines which may turn on without you knowing it. This can cause people and pets to breathe in dangerous and life-threatening fumes.

If you think someone was exposed to carbon monoxide, contact the New Jersey Poison Control Center immediately for medical treatment advice and guidance. Anyone may call 24/7 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 the Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222 or [start an online chat](#). If someone isn't breathing, is having difficulty waking 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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