

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

## HEALTH ADVISORY

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For Immediate Release

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### Hidden Summer Dangers Most People Overlook

*The biggest risks aren't always obvious - and what seems minor may quickly escalate into a call to poison control*

As Memorial Day weekend kicks off the summer season, it marks a time when everyday activities - from cookouts and outdoor gatherings to travel - can bring often-overlooked risks.

Drinks that are easily mistaken for something else, medicine and vaping or cannabis products left within reach, unsafe food handling and improper use of grills or gas-powered generators can lead to dangerous exposures.

“People don’t expect something serious to happen at a cookout or while they’re boating or camping - but we know hazards hide in plain sight in all environments,” said Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](#).

#### Drink Mix-Ups and Summer Heat Can Increase Risk

Alcoholic drinks, mocktails and drinks containing cannabis can look like everyday beverages – such as juice, soda, or flavored water – making it easy to grab the wrong drink by mistake. Some drinks, including pre-mixed hard seltzers, energy drinks, and cannabis-infused beverages, may also contain alcohol, high levels of caffeine, or THC – raising the risk of unexpected or serious health effects.

“If you can’t tell what’s in a cup at a glance, that’s already a risk,” Calello said. “Clear labeling and keeping beverages with alcohol or other active ingredients separate from other drinks can help prevent mix-ups.”

Hot weather can make these effects more dangerous by increasing dehydration and causing alcohol and other substances to affect the body more quickly.

“Heat changes how the body responds,” Calello added. “When it’s hot outside and you combine that with alcohol or medications, the effects amplify – leading to faster intoxication, dehydration, and a higher risk of serious illness.”

**Safety tips:**

- Separate non-alcoholic beverages from drinks containing alcohol and cannabis to avoid mix-ups
- Label drinks clearly so it is easy to know what's inside
- Read labels carefully as some drinks may contain THC or high levels of caffeine
- Don't leave drinks unattended
- Never store alcohol in juice or water containers
- Drink water and limit alcohol intake, especially in hot weather

**Keep Cookouts Safe by Grilling Smart**

Outdoor cooking increases the risk of foodborne illness, especially when food is left out too long or undercooked. Bacteria grow quickly in warm temperatures.

"Time and temperature - not appearance - determine if food is safe," said Bruce Ruck, managing director of the New Jersey Poison Control Center.

**Safety tips:**

- Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood and other perishable foods cold until grilling
- Separate raw and cooked foods – and never reuse plates, cutting boards or utensils that were used for raw foods until they are washed with hot, soapy water.
- Cook meat thoroughly (use a food thermometer)
- Discard perishable foods left out more than two hours (or one hour if temperatures are 90°F or higher)
- Wash hands often, especially after handling raw meats and seafood

**The Danger You Can't See or Smell**

Carbon monoxide (CO) from gas generators, grills, and engines can build up quickly in enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces - even in places people may not expect, such as boats and recreation vehicles.

On boats, carbon monoxide can collect in cabins or near engine exhaust, especially when idling, putting people at risk when swimming or spending time near the back. In RVs and campers, exhaust fumes can enter through windows, doors or vents when fuel-powered equipment is running nearby, even outdoors.

"Carbon monoxide is especially dangerous because it's invisible and odorless, so people may not realize they're being exposed until symptoms become serious," Calello warned.

**Safety tips:**

- Never use grills or fuel-powered equipment indoors or in enclosed spaces
- Do not use grills in garages, even with the door open
- Avoid swimming or lingering near boat exhaust areas
- Keep generators and engines away from RVs, sleeping cabins or enclosed spaces

- Install carbon monoxide detectors designed for a specific setting, as homes, boats and RVs require different types of detectors

### **Everyday and Seasonal Products Can Be Misused**

Medications, vitamins, vaping products, cannabis edibles, and common summer items such as torch fuel, fireworks and pool chemicals can all pose risks - especially when left within reach or used improperly.

Items left out “just for a minute” are a common cause of unintentional exposure in children and older adults. Fireworks and torch fuels may seem harmless, but even small ingestions can be dangerous. Torch oil, in particular, can cause severe, life-threatening lung injury. Pool chemicals such as chlorine can also cause serious harm if mixed improperly or used in poorly ventilated areas.

“It’s not always the product: Sometimes it’s how it’s used or stored that creates the danger,” Ruck said. “With medications, fuels, and chemicals, even a small mistake can quickly lead to a serious emergency.”

### **Safety tips:**

- Keep medications, cannabis and vaping products locked and out of sight
- Store fuels, chemicals and other products in their original containers
- Don’t leave items out - even briefly or in bags, purses or on counters
- Handle fuels safely by never pouring them into drink containers and storing them securely to prevent spills
- Never mix chemicals such as chlorine with other cleaners
- Keep fireworks away from children and pets as they can cause poisoning if swallowed

### **When in Doubt, Call Early**

If something doesn’t seem right -whether it’s a possible ingestion, illness after a cookout, a medication reaction, or exposure to fumes or chemicals -don’t wait; Call the New Jersey Poison Control Center.

“You don’t need to have all the answers before calling poison control,” Calello said. “We’ll help you stay calm and take the right next steps.”

Children, teenagers and adults can get help 24/7 by calling the Poison Helpline at 1-800-222-1222 or [chatting here](#). For life-threatening emergencies - such as trouble breathing, difficulty waking or seizures - call 911.

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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

**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**

Established in 1954, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School (NJMS), part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, annually graduates around 170 skilled physicians and offers MD/PhD, MD/MPH, and MD/MBA programs. Committed to excellence in education, research, clinical care, and community engagement, NJMS comprises 20 dynamic academic departments and collaborates with healthcare partners, including University Hospital. With renowned faculty, a student-run clinic, and many cutting-edge centers and institutes, NJMS invites you to explore its rich history and academic programs at <https://njms.rutgers.edu/>.

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