

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

## HEALTH ADVISORY

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For Immediate Release

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### Poison Control Center Warns Older Adults and Caregivers About Opioid Dangers

*Older adults are more sensitive to such medicines, making careful use, monitoring and caregiver involvement critical to preventing serious harm*

The New Jersey Poison Control Center is urging seniors and their caregivers to take extra precautions with opioid medicines.

While opioids are commonly prescribed for pain management, older adults are especially vulnerable to accidental misuse, drug interactions, and life-threatening side effects.

“Age-related changes in the body make seniors more sensitive to opioids,” said Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](#). “Even when taken as prescribed, opioids can cause confusion, drowsiness, dangerous falls, slowed breathing, and overdose.”

Opioid poisoning among older adults (ages 55 and older) remains a serious concern for the New Jersey Poison Control Center, as the risk for dangerous health effects increases with age. In 2025, the poison control center responded to 334 opioid-related exposure cases, an increase from 321 cases in 2024.

These exposures frequently involved patients who accidentally took too much of a prescription opioid, combined opioids with alcohol or other sedating medicines, misused prescription opioids or used illicit substances, many of which resulted in hospitalizations and serious, sometimes life-threatening complications.

#### Key Risks for Seniors on Opioids:

- Greater sensitivity to medication side effects due to age-related changes in metabolism
- Higher likelihood of dangerous drug interactions (especially with sleep aids, anti-anxiety medicines and alcohol)
- Memory or vision issues increasing the chance of taking the wrong dose
- Increased risk of falls, fractures and overdose

### **Safety Tips for Seniors and Caregivers:**

- Use a pill organizer to help prevent dosing errors and keep an up-to-date list of all medicines. Choose a child-resistant organizer if children live in or visit the home.
- Never mix opioids with alcohol or sedating medications unless cleared by a doctor.
- Store medicines in a secure location away from children, visitors and pets.
- Dispose of unused opioids at community take-back locations.
- Call the New Jersey Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 immediately if you're unsure about a dose or if symptoms occur.

“Families can play a big role in helping seniors stay safe,” Calello said. “Something as simple as setting up a daily pillbox or checking in on medication routines can prevent an overdose.”

For fast, free, confidential help for a potential poisoning or question, contact the New Jersey Poison Control Center. Poison control centers are a medical resource for the public and healthcare providers. Anyone can call for medical help – children, teenagers and adults.

Get help 24/7: Call the Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222 or [chat here](#). 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**

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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