

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

HEALTH ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

June 30, 2026

Ahead of July 4, New Jersey Poison Experts Warn of Torch Fuel Dangers at Summer Gatherings

Common backyard fuels can be mistaken for drinks, putting children and pets at risk of serious lung injury

As New Jersey families prepare for Fourth of July cookouts and summer gatherings, experts with the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](http://NJPoisonCenter.org) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](http://RutgersNJMS.edu) are warning about a serious but often underestimated risk: toxicity from outdoor torch fuel.

Each summer, the state's poison control center receives calls about children swallowing torch fuel as more families spend time outdoors. Holiday weekends such as the Fourth of July bring larger crowds and more distractions, raising the risk of exposure.

These liquids are often clear or lightly tinted and some are scented. They can be mistaken for water, juice, or a sports drink – especially if poured into cups or left unattended. Pets also can be harmed if they lick spills or drink from containers within reach.

Even a small sip is dangerous.

“Swallowing torch fuel is a medical emergency,” said Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the New Jersey Poison Control Center. “During the summer, we see more opportunities for these exposures as families spend more time outdoors. These liquids can look harmless, but just a tiny amount can enter the lungs and cause serious breathing problems very quickly. A child may seem fine at first, but symptoms can appear suddenly and become severe.”

Torch fuel can easily enter the lungs if swallowed, causing chemical pneumonia and serious breathing problems.

“Holiday weekends like the Fourth of July often mean more activity, more distractions, and more products like torch fuel in use,” said Bruce Ruck, managing director of the poison control center. “It only takes a small amount to cause big harm. Taking a few simple precautions can prevent a life-threatening situation and help keep celebrations safe for both people and pets.”

Safety Tips for Families

Follow these steps to help keep everyone safe:

- **Never pour torch fuel into cups or drink bottles.** Keep the fuel in its original container so it isn't mistaken for a beverage.
- **Refill torches away from guests.** Use a funnel, then close the bottle tightly and put it away immediately.
- **Clean up spills right away.** Even small amounts left on surfaces can be touched, swallowed or tracked indoors by children or pets.
- **Keep torch fuel and torches out of sight and reach.** Store them safely and make sure torches are stable and won't tip over.
- **Do NOT make someone throw up.** Vomiting can cause the liquid to enter the lungs and make the situation worse.

When in Doubt, Call Immediately

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.

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

Stay Connected : [FB](#) | [X](#) | [Instagram](#) | [TikTok](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Website](#)

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/>.

###