

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

HEALTH ADVISORY

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As a Nor'easter Threatens the Garden State, One Generator Mistake Can Prove Deadly

Experts with the New Jersey Poison Control Center warn residents about the risks of carbon monoxide poisoning during power outages and storm recovery

With a nor'easter threatening New Jersey through the weekend with heavy rain, coastal flooding, high winds and potential power outages, the New Jersey Poison Control Center is urging residents to protect themselves from a hidden danger that often follows severe weather: carbon monoxide poisoning.

Exposures frequently occur when power outages lead people to use generators and other fuel-burning equipment improperly.

"Carbon monoxide poisoning is one of the leading hidden dangers during and after severe weather," said Bruce Ruck, managing director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](http://NJPoisonCenter.org) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](http://RutgersNJMS.edu). "When storms knock out power, people often focus on getting electricity back, but a single mistake with a generator can have deadly consequences for an entire household, including pets. That's why it's critical to use generators outdoors and take every carbon monoxide alarm seriously."

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an invisible, odorless gas that can cause serious injury or death. Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning often mimic common viral illnesses, making it difficult to recognize the danger. Symptoms may include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. Carbon monoxide poisoning should be suspected if symptoms improve after leaving the building or if multiple people in the home become sick at the same time.

"Working carbon monoxide detectors save lives," Ruck said. "Install detectors on every level of your home and near sleeping areas, test them before the storm arrives, and replace batteries or units as needed. If a carbon monoxide alarm sounds, do not ignore it."

If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, get help immediately:

1. Get everyone, including pets, out to fresh air immediately.
2. Call 911 right away if someone is unconscious, difficult to wake up, not breathing normally or having a seizure.
3. Don't delay getting outside to fresh air by opening windows or searching for the source of the gas.
4. Contact your local fire department or utility company.
5. Call the New Jersey Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 for immediate medical guidance.

Carbon monoxide safety tips during and after storms:

- Install carbon monoxide detectors on every level of your home and near sleeping areas and test them before the storm arrives. Replace batteries or units as needed.
- Use generators outdoors only and place them at least 20 feet from your home and your neighbors' homes and away from doors, windows and vents.
- Don't move generators into garages, sheds, basements, crawl spaces, enclosed porches or other enclosed areas to protect them from rain.
- Use grills, camp stoves and other fuel-burning devices outdoors only.
- If a carbon monoxide alarm sounds, don't ignore it. Leave the area immediately and get everyone, including pets, into fresh air.
- Suspect carbon monoxide poisoning if multiple household members become sick at the same time, especially if a pet also appears ill or distressed.
- Don't leave a vehicle running or charge devices using a vehicle parked inside a garage, even if the garage door is open.

If you think someone was exposed to carbon monoxide, contact the New Jersey Poison Control Center immediately. Free, confidential expert medical guidance is available 24/7 through the Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222 or by [chatting online](#).

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Available for Media Interviews

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About New Jersey Poison Control Center/NJPIES

The New Jersey Poison Control Center, officially known as the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES), is the state's poison control center and is part of Rutgers New Jersey Medical School's Department of Emergency Medicine.

Poison specialists are doctors, nurses, and pharmacists who provide free, expert medical guidance for poisonings, medication errors, overdoses, drug interactions, carbon monoxide incidents, environmental hazards, household chemicals, bites and stings, plant-related concerns, and other poisoning emergencies. Services are free, confidential, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and accessible in any language.

Need Poison Control? Call the Poison Help line at 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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