RUTGERS HEALTH
New Jersey Medical School

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

HEALTH ADVISORY

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Thanksgiving Safety Starts Before the First Bite

From food recalls to leftovers, the New Jersey Poison Control Center shares what to know before preparing Thanksgiving dinner.

During last year's holiday season, specialists at the New Jersey Poison Control Center at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School responded to more than 200 food-related calls, including concerns about spoiled food, leftovers, food preparation, and potential foodborne illness.

As families prepare for Thanksgiving, experts at the New Jersey Poison Control Center are encouraging consumers to check for food recalls before shopping and cooking.

"Most people don't think to check food recalls before they start shopping or cooking for Thanksgiving, but it's one of the easiest ways to protect family and friends," said Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the New Jersey Poison Control Center. "A recalled ingredient can affect an entire meal and potentially dozens of guests gathered around the same table."

Consumers may check current food recalls on the websites of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture before shopping for or preparing holiday meals.

Poison Control experts recommend these food safety basics:

- Wash hands, utensils and food preparation surfaces often.
- Keep raw meat and poultry separate from foods that are ready to eat.
- Use a food thermometer to ensure foods reach safe internal temperatures.
- Refrigerate leftovers within two hours.

One of the most common Thanksgiving food safety mistakes is thawing a turkey on the kitchen counter. Turkey should be thawed in the refrigerator, where it remains at a safe temperature. Depending on its size, a turkey may require several days to thaw completely, so planning ahead is essential. A food thermometer remains the only reliable way to ensure foods reach safe internal temperatures.

"The holiday meal doesn't end when dinner is over," said Bruce Ruck, managing director of the New Jersey Poison Control Center. "Leftovers are often where we see preventable food safety mistakes. Perishable foods should be refrigerated within two hours."

Harmful bacteria cannot always be seen, smelled or tasted. When in doubt, throw it out.

Holiday gatherings can present additional risks for children and pets. Medicines, cannabis edibles and other cannabis products, nicotine products, and vapes brought into the home by guests should be kept out of reach. Some of these products may resemble everyday foods, drinks or treats, increasing the risk of accidental exposure. Pet owners should be mindful that holiday favorites, including chocolate, grapes, raisins, fatty foods, and products containing xylitol, a sugar substitute, can be toxic to pets.

The New Jersey Poison Control Center is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to provide free, confidential, expert medical guidance and individualized assessment. Call the Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222 or chat online.

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 New Jersey Medical School

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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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