

The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System — Serving New Jersey Since 1983

## NEWS RELEASE

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Media to contact:  
800-222-1222  
800-962-1253 if outside NJ

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### Deck the Halls with Safety and Holiday Cheer

NJ Poison Control Center Warns of Common Holiday Hazards

**(New Jersey, NJ)** – The most wonderful time of year can quickly turn hazardous as holiday stressors increase the risk for preventable poisoning injuries. Many common household products can pose a significant risk. Anything can be a poison if it is used in the wrong way, in the wrong amount, or by the wrong person. The dose of a product determines how toxic something is to the body.

“Even though the “to do” list seems to grow as the days count down, let’s not forget about the importance of making the holidays injury free,” says Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Department of Emergency Medicine](#).

“The holidays are an exciting yet potentially dangerous time of year,” says Calello. “We become distracted and forget to pay attention to what’s happening around us, especially in our homes. Accidental poisoning injuries often occur right under our noses. It’s important to know that you can call your local poison control center at 1-800-222-1222 for immediate medical help when an emergency or question arises.”

Celebrating the holidays during a pandemic brings about other health concerns. Traditional holiday activities carry a high risk for spreading both COVID-19 and seasonal flu germs. This year, families should choose [safer ways](#) to celebrate to prevent spreading illness. Holiday gatherings should only include the people you live with (immediate household members). Now that community spread is so high, it’s likely that someone at your gathering will unknowingly pass coronavirus to the entire group.

Potential household dangers involve more than just medicines. Many people, especially those who are not used to worrying about the curious minds of small children or pets, often forget some of the things we carry with us pose a real danger if used in the wrong way or by the wrong person. Things like medicine, certain foods, and even personal care products can be dangerous in the hands of the wrong person (or animal).

#### Home

- **Medicine** – Be sure to provide house guests with a secure (locked) place to store their medicines (over the counter, prescription, vitamins, herbal or dietary supplements) while visiting. Remember not to leave medicines in a purse, on a nightstand or counter, or in the bathroom as the items are easily accessible from these places.

- **Carbon Monoxide (CO)** – Don't be fooled, carbon monoxide can and does kill every year. CO is a poisonous gas overlooked by many because it gives no warning – you can't see, smell, hear, or taste it. The buildup of carbon monoxide gas is undetectable without a CO detector. Symptoms of CO poisoning can easily be confused with symptoms of viral illnesses like the common cold, the flu, and COVID-19.
- **Disc Batteries & Magnets** – These items are usually found in watches, toys, games, flashing costume jewelry, singing greeting cards, holiday decorations, and remote-control devices. Disc batteries and magnets are easy to swallow making them a choking hazard for children and pets. Disc batteries may also get stuck in the throat or stomach causing serious burns and possible death. Magnets can also cause serious damage to internal organs.
- **Pets** – Accidental poisonings happen to pets, too. Make sure to keep the following products out of sight and reach of pets — chocolate, cocoa, candy and sugarless gum that contains xylitol, yeast bread, dough, leftover fatty meat scraps, fruitcakes with raisins and currants, alcohol and illicit drugs. Ingestion of any of these can cause serious harm and even death.

### Entertaining

- **Food Safety** – Getting sick from eating contaminated food is quite common. Although anyone is susceptible to food poisoning, the effects may be more serious for certain groups such as young children, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems. The effects of food poisoning are not always immediate and can range from mild to severe.
- **Alcohol** – If accidentally swallowed by children and pets, alcohol can be toxic, even a small amount. Alcohol affects children and pets differently than adults. Immediately empty alcoholic drinks left around the house after a party to prevent an accidental ingestion. A person or pet who seems drunk or has passed out may be showing early signs of alcohol poisoning and be in real danger. Get immediate medical help. "Sleeping it off" is never a safe option. Know the [critical signs](#) of alcohol poisoning.
- **Marijuana Edibles** – Be mindful of what guests bring into your home. Many edible products look nearly identical to store-bought candy and other food products. Unsuspecting adults and children may not be able to tell the products apart. Pets can be poisoned by edibles too. Products may contain high concentrations of THC (the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana), causing the potential for severe effects.
- **Vaping Products and Liquid Nicotine** – Liquid nicotine exposures concern poison center specialists. Liquid nicotine, also known as e-liquid, vape juice, or e-juice, contains concentrated nicotine. Swallowing even small amounts of this substance can pose serious and even fatal health

effects for young children and pets. When not being used, vaping products including their refill liquids should be stored in a locked area.

If you think someone came in contact with something potentially dangerous, do not hesitate to get help from your local poison control center. Call 1-800-222-1222 for free, medical treatment advice and information, 24/7. If someone is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up, or having a seizure, immediately call 9-1-1.

New Jersey residents can: Call (1-800-222-1222); Text (973-339-0702); Chat via [website](#)

### **Help is Just a Phone Call Away!**

Stay Connected: Facebook ([@NJPIES](#)) and Twitter ([@NJPoisonCenter](#)) for breaking news, safety tips, trivia questions, etc.

### **Real People. Real Answers.**

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#### **Available for Media Interviews**

Diane P. 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

Lewis S. Nelson, MD, Professor and Chair of Emergency Medicine at Rutgers NJ Medical School

#### **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 Biomedical and Health Sciences 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; Text 973-339-0702; [Chat](#). Stay Connected: [FB](#) / [Twitter](#) / [Website](#)

#### **About Rutgers New Jersey Medical School**

Founded in 1954, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School is the oldest school of medicine in the state. Today it is part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and graduates approximately 170 physicians a year. In addition to providing the MD degree, the school offers MD/PhD, MD/MPH and MD/MBA degrees through collaborations with other institutions of higher education. Dedicated to excellence in education, research, clinical care and community outreach, the medical school comprises 20 academic departments and works with several healthcare partners, including its principal teaching hospital, University Hospital. Its faculty consists of numerous world-renowned scientists and many of the region's "top doctors." Home to the nation's oldest student-run clinic, New Jersey Medical School hosts more than 50 centers and institutes, including the Public Health Research Institute Center, the Global Tuberculosis Institute and the Neurological Institute of New Jersey. For more information please visit: [nims.rutgers.edu](http://nims.rutgers.edu).

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