

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

MEDIA ALERT

Media Contacts:
800-222-1222 (800-962-1253 outside NJ)

Dangers Facing College Freshmen - Be Aware and Avoid Mishaps -

Steven Marcus, MD, Executive and Medical Director,
Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D., Director, Drug Information and Professional Education
New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES)

Available for Interviews

(Newark, NJ) – August 18, 2014 — Mid August marks the time of year when high school graduates prepare to enter their freshman year of college, with many leaving home for the first time. With all the responsibilities and stressors that come with adjusting to both the social pressures and expectations of college life, it's not uncommon for some freshmen, as well as upper classmen, to participate in potentially dangerous behavior throughout their college years.

The NJ Poison Experts would like to call attention to a few concerns facing incoming freshmen

- **Binge Drinking (Chugging):** Although underage drinking is illegal and therefore not endorsed by poison center experts, we know it happens on college campuses across the country. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines it as men drinking 5 or more alcoholic drinks within a short period of time or women drinking 4 or more drinks within a short period of time. The chance of getting sick and dying from alcohol related health problems increases significantly for those who binge drink.

"Drinking too much, too fast can essentially kill you," said Steven Marcus, MD, executive and medical director of the NJ Poison Center. "Keep in mind that alcohol is a depressant, which means it can slow your breathing, heart rate, and decrease blood pressure especially if blood alcohol levels rise sharply in a short time period," said Marcus. When this happens, people lose consciousness and can die. Alcohol poisoned individuals also increase their risk of dying by choking on their own vomit." Other unforeseen dangers may include car crashes, violence, suicide, alcohol poisoning, unintended pregnancy, STDs/HIV/Hepatitis, liver disease, neurological problems, poor control of diabetes, children born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), high blood pressure, stroke, and other cardiovascular diseases.

For those students of legal drinking age who choose to drink alcohol, do so **responsibly**. Keep your eye on your drink at all times to protect yourself from having a date-rape drug dropped into your drink without your knowledge— both men and women are at risk of being drugged. Never leave drinks unattended and do not accept drinks from a stranger. Students should try to drink their drinks right out of the original container which lowers the risk of someone contaminating their drink.

- **Misuse of Drugs as Study Aids:** "Study drugs" are drugs such as prescription medicines for ADHD and OTC energy producing supplements and coffee or caffeine, that are misused/abused to help a student stay awake and study. Students often believe that these drugs enhance or focus concentration and increase stamina when they cram for tests or write lengthy papers. The use of study drugs is not new. For years, students have looked for ways to make studying easier, more efficient and more manageable. When prescribed to and used appropriately by those who have ADHD, these prescription medicines are safe to use.
 - **Prescription medicines:** These medicines contain the stimulants dextroamphetamine, methylphenidate and their derivatives. Some students without ADHD "abuse" these medicines as a study drug. The NJ Poison Experts remind the public that it is illegal and potentially harmful to share their prescription medications with

someone else who it was not prescribed for. For some people with undiagnosed or preexisting mental health issues, these prescription drugs can make their conditions worse.

We urge students to use lockable medicine cabinets/boxes to keep all their medications, both prescription and over the counter, locked up at all times. This will help prevent such medicines from being stolen, misused, and abused. Rates of prescription drug abuse in the U.S. are alarmingly high, as are the number of unintentional poisonings and overdoses due to these drugs.

- Caffeine: Historically, this has been limited to drinking multiple cups of coffee or tea to help students through all-nighters. The dose is increased considerably, however, by taking caffeine pills or consuming multiple energy drinks. Caffeine pills can contain up to 200 mg. of caffeine in each pill, two to three times the amount in a cup of coffee. Energy drinks also contain a large amount of caffeine, and some contain additional stimulants. Pure caffeine is a powerful stimulant, therefore, even a small amount of it can cause a fatal overdose due to the product being nearly 100 percent pure caffeine. According to some reports, one teaspoon of caffeine powder is equal to drinking about 25 cups of coffee.
- **Carbon Monoxide Poisoning**: Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning is a serious concern once the weather begins to get colder. Often referred to as the “Silent Killer” because it is a gas that gives no warning – you can’t see it, smell it or taste it. When the gas is breathed into the body it combines with the body’s blood and prevents it from absorbing and using oxygen. Exposure can produce headaches, sleepiness, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, impaired vision and coordination, and even death. If living off campus in an apartment or home, be sure there are working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors installed; change the batteries twice a year.

Adjusting to freshmen year of college can be quite scary for students and especially for their parents. If an exposure occurs, it’s good to know help is just a phone call away. Do not take chances by waiting until symptoms appear. If someone is unconscious, not breathing, seizing/convulsing, bleeding profusely, difficult to arouse/wake up, etc. call 911 immediately, otherwise call the **NJ Poison Experts at (1-800-222-1222)**. Help is always available – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

“Students should program the Poison Help line into their cell phones in the event they need our help. Calling 1-800-222-1222 from anywhere in the country will connect them to the nearest poison center,” said Dr. Marcus. “Don’t waste valuable time looking up information on the Internet when every minute counts. Many of the calls we get are genuine emergencies.” Having a poison expert give you exact instructions for your specific situation can help significantly during those critical first few minutes.

Help is Just a Phone Call Away!

Remember, calls are free and confidential and help is always available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year, even during bouts of Mother Nature like Hurricane Sandy. Call 800-222-1222, chat via www.njpies.org, or text in at 8002221222@njpies.org to contact a NJ Poison Expert. Help is available in more than 150 languages.

We are social. Join us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/njpies) and Twitter ([@NJPoisonCenter](https://twitter.com/NJPoisonCenter)) for breaking news, safety tips, trivia questions, etc. Share what you learn with your family (including children), friends, and coworkers.

Real People. Real Answers.

About NJPIES

As New Jersey’s only poison control center, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System provides information on poison prevention and treatments. Chartered in 1983, NJPIES provides free consultation through telephone hot line services and the Web. Medical professionals such as physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer confidential advice regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention, drugs, food poisoning, animal bites and more. These specialists are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

NJPIES coordinates state poison education and research and is designated as the regional poison center by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It tracks incidences of adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines in order to monitor potential public health issues and provide data to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A division of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health of the New Jersey Medical School of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. NJPIES has a state-of-the-art center located on the school's Newark campus. NJPIES is funded, in part, by the NJ Department of Health and the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

New Jersey residents seeking immediate information about treating poison emergencies, and those with any drug information questions, should call the toll-free hot line, **800-222-1222**, any time. The hearing impaired may call **973-926-8008**. For more information, visit www.njpies.org or call **973-972-9280**.

About Rutgers

Established in 1766, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is America's eighth oldest institution of higher learning and one of the nation's premier public research universities. Serving more than 65,000 students on campuses, centers, institutes and other locations throughout the state, Rutgers is the only public university in New Jersey that is a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities.

Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) is the health care education, research, and clinical division of Rutgers University, comprising nine schools and their attendant faculty practices, centers, institutes and clinics; New Jersey's leading comprehensive cancer care center; and New Jersey's largest behavioral health care network.

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