



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



NEWS RELEASE

Media Contacts:

Nancy Sergeant, SGW, 973-263-5471, nsergeant@sgw.com

Mary Appelmann, SGW, 973-263-5182, mappelmann@sgw.com

Alicia Gambino, MA, CHES, NJPIES Director of Public Education, 973-972-9280, agambino@njpies.org

Change of Season Is a Good Time to Discard Unused, Expired Medication *Regular medicine cabinet cleanouts help prevent deadly consequences*

Dr. Steven Marcus, Executive and Medical Director,
New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES) *Available for interviews*

NEWARK, N.J. — September 17, 2010 — If your household is like most in America, you could be unwittingly contributing to accidental poisonings, drug overdoses, and drug abuse, simply by keeping unused, outdated, or expired pharmaceuticals in your medicine cabinet.

That's why the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES) recommends regular medicine cabinet cleanouts. The changes of season, and the times of year when you reset your clocks, also are good times to clean out your medicine cabinet, according to NJPIES.

"Even though they don't fall under the Controlled Substance Act, prescriptions are, by definition, controlled substances," explained Dr. Steven Marcus, executive and medical director of NJPIES. "Prescriptions are given by a physician to a specific person for a limited time in a defined dose, and they can be very toxic if used in any other way than prescribed. No one would keep heroin and cocaine in the medicine cabinet, but inadvertently, homes are havens for drug abuse due to the increasing number of controlled prescription medications on hand in the average home."

Medication abuse is on the rise in the United States, with national health officials increasingly prioritizing abuse and misuse of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications as a key public health issue.¹ The situation is also of concern in New Jersey, where state data from the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System shows that reported poison incidences involving prescription and OTC medications rose from 38 percent of all reported exposures in 2000 to 47.7 percent in 2008.

In her testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, noted that seven of the top 11 drugs most commonly abused by high school seniors are either prescribed or bought over the counter.¹ "Parents are not addressing the problem because they aren't aware of it," Marcus noted. A 2008 New Jersey study conducted by the Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey found that 44 percent of New Jersey parents knew little or nothing about the dangers of prescription drug abuse.²

Prevention Is Key

Unused, expired, or outdated medication poses a risk to three primary groups. Young children may get into the medicine and overdose on it. Teenagers, even babysitters, may seek it out as a drug source. Senior citizens, who typically manage multiple medications and have poorer vision, may become confused and mix up their medications. Each of these scenarios can have deadly consequences.

NJPIES offers the following advice about prescription drug abuse:

- Take your medicine exactly as prescribed.
- Do not share prescription medications.
- Take an inventory. Know what is there and when it expires.
- Clean out your medicine cabinet regularly. Safely dispose of your unused, unwanted, and expired medicine.
- Consider locking your medicine cabinet. This keeps potential hazards out of the hands of young children and teens, including babysitters or family friends.
- Talk to your children about the dangers of prescription drug abuse.

Call to Action

NJPIES leaders urge medical professionals, parents, educators, caregivers, and the general public to call the toll-free poison center hotline, 800-222-1222, for further information.

Local Medicine Cleanout Drives

NJPIES is a partner in two collection drives this fall to help consumers safely dispose of prescription pharmaceuticals.

The first drive starts September 25, when the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) launches its first National Prescription Drug Take-Back campaign. The campaign is designed to bring a national focus to the issue of prescription drug abuse. Law enforcement officials will staff collection centers throughout the state from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. See www.dea.gov to find a site near you.

On November 13, you are invited to take part in Operation Medicine Cabinet. During last year's Operation Medicine Cabinet, residents in 21 counties generated 9,000 pounds of medicine during the four-hour event. This year, collection points will be available from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Visit www.americanmedicinechest.com for more information.

NJPIES encourages New Jersey residents to participate. Collections are anonymous.

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 hotline 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 the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, its state-of-the-art center is located on the school's Newark campus.

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

About UMDNJ

The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey is the nation's largest freestanding public health sciences university, with more than 5,500 students. The state's three medical schools, a dental school, a graduate school of biomedical sciences, a school of health-related professions, a school of nursing, and a school of public health are housed on five campuses — Newark, New Brunswick/Piscataway, Scotch Plains, Camden, and Stratford. Annually, there are more than 2 million patient visits at UMDNJ facilities and faculty practices at the campuses. UMDNJ operates University Hospital, a Level I trauma center, in Newark, and University Behavioral HealthCare, a mental health and addiction-services network.

###

Cited Sources:

¹ Nora Volkow, director of NIDA, testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs (March 12, 2008), <http://www.hhs.gov/asl/testify/2008/03/t20080312a.html>.

² "New Jersey Wins National Recognition for Prescription Drug Abuse Awareness Campaign," news release, <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/states/newsrel/2009/nwk051209.html>.