

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

NEWS RELEASE

Media Contacts:

800-222-1222 (800-962-1253 outside NJ)

Snow for the Thanksgiving Holiday Tips to Avoid Poisoning Exposures during Severe Weather

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Available for Interviews

(Newark, NJ) – November 25, 2014 — Weather reports are calling for the first snowfall of the winter season to hit New Jersey just in time for the Thanksgiving holiday. With significant snow expected in parts of the state, dangerous conditions lay ahead for those traveling for the holiday. The NJ Poison Experts have weathered previous storms alongside residents (24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year). From our experience with Super Storm Sandy, we learned a great deal about unintentional poisonings/exposures that may occur in the midst of severe weather. Unless we all prepare quickly, this approaching storm may just catch us as unprepared as Sandy.

"Storms are known to result in illness and even deaths from hypothermia and carbon monoxide poisoning, as well as exposures to a variety of substances," said Steven Marcus, MD, executive and medical director of the NJ Poison Center. Exposures to carbon monoxide often happen when people attempt to heat their homes by using space heaters and portable generators that run on kerosene, propane, or natural gas without proper ventilation. The danger occurs when too much carbon monoxide gets trapped inside an area that is poorly ventilated.

Carbon monoxide poisoning is 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. Exposure to carbon monoxide can produce headaches, sleepiness, fatigue, confusion and irritability at low levels. At higher levels, it can result in nausea, vomiting, irregular heartbeat, impaired vision and coordination, and death.

"To prepare for tomorrow's storm, program the Poison Help Hotline (800-222-1222) into all phones (home, cell, and office) now," said Dr. Marcus. Keep your cell phone charged whenever possible. We learned from Super Storm Sandy how important a fully charged cell phone can be. If power is lost it may be lost for an extensive period of time and your cell phone may become your lifeline! "Remember, the experts are hard at work responding to your calls for help, 24/7/365. Protecting yourself and being prepared is half the battle when dealing with severe weather," said Marcus.

Key safety tips and prevention precautions that may potentially save your life or the life of a loved one,

- 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).
- Stay home and off the roads if at all possible. Driving conditions in severe weather deteriorate quickly.
- Rock salt exposures occur frequently during severe weather. Children and pets can easily access rock salt left in garages, outside, hallways, etc. Although, as of now, we have only had mild exposures and no serious illness from the reported exposures, the potential for serious poisoning from ingestion of ice melting materials is real and exposure is to be avoided. Keep these products locked up and out of sight and reach.
- If you fill the bathtub with water to be a reservoir for use in case of a power outage, use only cold water to prevent severe burns to kids and pets. Be sure the tub is not accessible to children and pet – if they fall in they may drown.
 - Water in tubs should only be used for flushing toilets and not as drinking water.
- Check batteries in your carbon monoxide detector and smoke detector. If you don't have either, install them immediately before the storm.
- Clear snow accumulation from the clothes dryer and heating vents, as well as from car exhaust pipes.

- If you find it necessary to dig your car out from snow, do not turn the car on until the surrounding snow is completely cleared and you are sure there is adequate ventilation around the car. Do not sit in a running car which is surrounded by snow, carbon monoxide may leak into the car exposing you to its dangers!
- Do not bring portable gas powered generators, propane stoves, propane lights, kerosene camping stoves, or charcoal stoves/grills into the home or garage. Place generators at least 25 feet from the house and never outside near any open windows or doors.
 - During storm cleanup, keep all gas powered cleaning equipment outside, away from the house when in use. Bringing and using them indoors.
- Prevent food poisoning by being mindful of food stored in refrigerators and freezers. Keep both refrigerator and freezer doors closed; open sparingly.
 - If it looks funny, smells funny or if you are just unsure - Remember, "When in doubt, throw it out."
 - When power is restored, allow time for the refrigerator to reach below 40 degrees Fahrenheit before restocking.
- Infants, children, and the elderly are at greatest risk for hypothermia. Stay warm and dress appropriately.
 - Wear insulated or layered clothing that does not retain moisture.
 - Don't forget to cover up head, face, and hands.
 - Some medications may increase your risk for hypothermia. Check with your doctor, pharmacist or call the NJ Poison Experts at 1-800-222-1222.
- Avoid drinking alcohol in cold temperatures
- Have flashlights and a radio with fresh batteries ready to use.

Do not take chances by either waiting until symptoms occur or wasting valuable time looking up information on the Internet. Every minute counts in emergencies.

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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