

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

## ***MEDIA ALERT***

Media Contacts:

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

### **Be Prepared for Snow-Related Poisoning Exposures**

-- What you need to know to prevent illness --

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*Available for Interviews*

(Newark, NJ) – February 9, 2017—Forecasters warn New Jersey residents of severe winter weather heading our way today. They predict the storm may dump enough snow on the Garden State to disrupt vital travel and daily functions. Dangerous driving/traveling conditions are expected – low visibility, slippery/icy roads, frigid temperatures, high wind, and snow accumulation. In addition to driving hazards, a winter storm also brings with it the possibility of unintentional poisoning exposures.

"Major storms like the one that's expected today are known to result in illnesses and even deaths from hypothermia, exposures to chemicals used in de-icing and prevention of freezing, and the potential for carbon monoxide poisoning," says Dr. Diane Calello, Medical Director of the NJ Poison Center. "Exposures to carbon monoxide (CO) often happen when people attempt to heat their homes using poorly vented space heaters, stoves or other sources of heat. Using gasoline, propane or natural gas generators indoors have produced tragedies during past storms. The danger occurs when too much carbon monoxide gets trapped inside an area that is poorly ventilated."

Since high winds can result in power outages, the poison experts encourage all residents to program the Poison Help Line (800-222-1222) into all phones (home, cell, and office) in preparation. 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 weathering the storm alongside you, responding to calls for help, 24/7/365," says Dr. Calello. Poison experts can be reached in the following ways: call 800-222-1222, chat via [www.njpies.org](http://www.njpies.org), or text [8002221222@njpies.org](mailto:8002221222@njpies.org); the hearing impaired may also use their TTY and call 973-926-8008.

Being prepared is half the battle when dealing with severe weather. Through education, the NJ Poison Experts hope to increase awareness about the potential dangers residents may face during such events. Although unintentional poisonings can cause serious injury and even death, they are preventable!

Below you will find key safety tips that may potentially save your life or the life of a loved one.

#### **Safety Tips to Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning:**

- Check the batteries in your carbon monoxide detector and smoke detector. If you do not have either detector, install them now, before the storm hits.
- Clear any snow accumulation from all outside dryer and heating vents.
- Remove snow from car exhaust pipe(s) before sitting in car and letting it warm up. Failure to remove snow can result in carbon monoxide poisoning. Be sure there is ample room for air to circulate in front and behind your car to allow any exhaust to dissipate and not build up around your car.
- DO NOT bring a portable gas powered generator into the home or garage –
  - Do not place them outside near any open windows/doors
  - They should be at least 25 feet from any house
  - Use only weather certified electrical cords outdoors
- DO NOT bring other gas powered equipment, propane stoves, propane lights, or kerosene camping stoves into the house or garage.

- DO NOT heat your home with your stove.
- DO NOT cook with or use charcoal grills to heat indoors or inside your house or garage.
- DO NOT idle a car in a closed garage. Once you pull in, immediately turn off the engine.
- Keep your home well ventilated. If need be, keep a window slightly cracked to allow airflow.
- During storm cleanup, keep all gas powered cleaning equipment outside away from the house when in use. Bringing and using them indoors could result in serious injury.
- Never siphon gasoline from your car by sucking on a tubing.
- Do not start your snow blower inside your home or garage.

**If you suspect Carbon Monoxide Poisoning, Take Immediate Action:**

1. If a loved one is unconscious or unresponsive, get them out of the house and call 911 immediately.
2. Exit the house/building immediately. Do not waste time opening windows to "air" it out; this will delay your escape and cause you to continue to breathe in dangerous fumes.
3. Contact your local fire department/energy provider.
4. Call the NJ Poison Experts, 800-222-1222, for immediate treatment advice. Do not waste time looking for information on the internet about carbon monoxide poisoning. Call us for fast, free and accurate information.

**General Safety Tips:**

- Have a flashlight with fresh batteries ready to use (you may have used the flashlight during previous storms so, replace the batteries if you did).
  - Make sure to use a flashlight when giving or taking medication. Read all labels carefully and put on your glasses to insure proper ability to read the directions.
- Have a battery-operated radio available and be sure the batteries are fresh.
- Keep cell phones charged as much as possible. Be sure to have the appropriate charger to use in your car should you house's power fail and you have access to a car.
- Keep rock salt locked up and out of sight and reach of children and pets.
- Risk for hypothermia increases with frigid temperatures. Infants, children, and the elderly are at greatest risk for hypothermia.
  - Signs and symptoms include headaches, sleepiness, fatigue, confusion and irritability, nausea, vomiting, irregular heartbeat, impaired vision and coordination, and death
  - Stay warm and dress appropriately! For prolonged exposure to cold, wear insulated or layered clothing that does not retain moisture. Wear a head cover!
  - Avoid over-exertion and excessive sweating in the cold. Snow shoveling is a very intense exercise. If you are not in top physical shape, do not attempt it yourself.
  - Warm beverages can help increase the body temperature.
  - Avoid drinking alcohol, especially in cold temperatures.
  - Some medications may increase your risk. Check with your doctor, pharmacist or call the Poison Control Center

**Safety Tips to Prevent Food Spoilage during a Power Outage:**

- With the threat of power outages, it is important to be careful about food stored in refrigerators and freezers. Food-borne illness, also known as food poisoning, results from the eating of food that is contaminated with harmful bacteria, viruses or other foreign material. Contamination is caused by improper food handling and preparation practices. The symptoms of food-borne illness are flu-like and may include abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and fever.
- In preparing for a power outage, make the temperature colder than usual on both freezers and refrigerators. This will prolong the cold after a power outage.
- During a power outage, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed and open them only when necessary.
- Place a refrigerator thermometer in the center of the middle shelf and check the temperature. If it has risen to 40 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, discard any potentially spoiled foods. Such foods include meat, poultry, fish, dairy and egg products, soft cheese, cooked beans, cooked rice, cooked potatoes, cooked pasta, potato salad, custard and pudding.
- Fill freezers to capacity, but not refrigerators. To properly chill food, refrigerators need room for the air to circulate.
- When power is restored, allow time for the refrigerator to reach below 40 degrees Fahrenheit before restocking.
- If it looks funny, smells funny or if you are just unsure, "When in doubt, throw it out!"

In the event of an exposure, don't waste valuable time looking up information on the Internet when every minute counts. 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)**.

Time is of the essence in many situations since poisons and medicines may act very quickly. 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!**

We are social. Join us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/njpies](http://www.facebook.com/njpies)) and Twitter (@NJPoisonCenter) for breaking news, safety tips, trivia questions, etc.

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

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#### **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 Emergency Medicine 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](http://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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