



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



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## NEWS RELEASE

### Allergy Suffers Beware

24/7 Multilingual Hotline: 1-800-222-1222

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

*Available for Interviews*

**NEWARK, N.J. — May 2011 —** We are going through one of the worst spring allergy seasons in history. Allergy sufferers know the symptoms...sneezing, watery itchy eyes, nasal congestion, runny nose, etc. This has led sufferers to go to their local pharmacies/supermarkets to seek medication to relieve the discomfort associated with allergies. The New Jersey Poison Information and Education System, NJPIES, cautions individuals to be careful when taking allergy medications or giving them to a child. There is a common misconception that non-prescription (over-the-counter/OTC) medications are not dangerous because they are sold without a prescription. Such medications may, in fact, produce serious side effects which may cause harm to those taking them.

The New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES) would like to raise awareness about the potential effects from OTC and prescription allergy medications. Adverse effects range from agitation to drowsiness and/or stomach upset to liver damage.

Before you reach for any allergy medication, either OTC or prescription, we recommend the following tips to prevent problems related to medication use:

- Almost all allergy medications can cause drowsiness and/or a relaxed state of mind. These side effects can cause operating equipment and driving to be dangerous. Also use caution when riding a bicycle and walking in the street. Be particularly careful if the individual seeking to use these medications is on other medications, particularly those which may also cause drowsiness. Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages while taking any medication, including allergy medications. Mixing the two could prove problematic.
- Allergy medications may interfere with vision. Blurring of vision may occur and interfere with driving and similar skills. Experiencing pain in the eyes or feeling as if there is something in the eye may be an indication of a serious side effect of many allergy medications and the need for medical evaluation.

- Select medications that treat **ONLY** the symptoms you have. For example, use a decongestant if you are congested, but only use decongestants with cough suppressant if you have a cough as well.
- Watch for duplicate active ingredients in products taken at the same time. Many times medications with different names and even different intended purposes contain the same active ingredients. Taking these together, even if each is in the intended dose, can result in serious overdose.
- Remember that more does not mean better. Don't take medicines longer or in higher doses than the label recommends. If symptoms persist, it is time to see a doctor.
- Be particularly careful about dosage recommendations. With liquid medications, it is best to use a measuring spoon or a dosing cup marked in teaspoons, not a common kitchen spoon.
- Follow the product label instructions. Be sure to put on a light and your glasses if needed to read the label carefully before each dose is taken or given to someone else.
- Avoid adverse drug interactions. If you are currently taking any prescription or non-prescription medications, ask your pharmacist or health care provider for assistance in choosing non-prescription medications. If this is not possible, questions can be directed to NJPIES at **1-800-222-1222**.

If you suspect a poisoning, **CALL THE POISON CONTROL CENTER'S HELP HOTLINE IMMEDIATELY at 1-800-222-1222**, for treatment advice. The hotline should be called both for emergency poisonings as well as for non-emergency questions regarding medications, household products, plants, environmental contaminants, or other poisons. The hotline is accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week! Remember, **Help Is Just a Phone Call Away!**

#### **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 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 should call the bilingual toll-free hot line, 1-800-222-1222, 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 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 attending. 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 two 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.