

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

## NEWS RELEASE

---

For Immediate Release

July 29, 2021

### **Drugged Driving Doesn't Just Involve Alcohol**

Driving Under the Influence of Medicines Can Be Just as Dangerous

**(New Jersey)** — Typically, when people hear the phrase “driving under the influence” or “drugged driving” it’s associated with driving under the influence of alcohol. However, driving under the influence can occur anytime someone uses a substance that may impair their ability to drive, including prescription and nonprescription (also called over-the-counter or OTC) medicines, herbal remedies, illegal/street drugs, and recreational drugs including alcohol and cannabis products.

“Many everyday substances have effects that can make driving or operating certain machinery extremely dangerous,” says Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Department of Emergency Medicine](#).

“It’s widely known that alcohol use affects a person’s ability to drive, however it’s not the only legal substance known to result in intoxicated/impaired driving. Other legal substances include prescription and nonprescription medicines, medicinal and recreational THC/marijuana products and CBD products.”

Many medicines and products contain ingredients that cause dangerous side effects like sleepiness, loss of focus or attention, blurred vision, fainting, and decreased coordination. The following prescription and nonprescription medicines are known to affect your ability to drive safely — anti-seizure medicines, sleeping-aids, muscle relaxants, anti-diarrhea medicines, anxiety drugs, antidepressants, pain medicines, allergy products, antipsychotic medicines, cough and cold products, antipsychotic drugs, products, diet pills, and motion sickness medicines.

“Other factors can greatly increase the side effects of medicines and interfere with driving,” says Calello. “Mixing medicines or products together can cause effects to intensify, which may lead to serious and even deadly drug interactions. Depending on the medicine and the dosing instructions, effects may be felt within a short amount of time and last for several hours to the next day.”

The message about drugged driving is clear — it’s dangerous for you, your passengers, and others on the road. Law enforcement considers driving while under the influence of legal and illegal substances as dangerous and unsafe as driving under the influence of alcohol. The legal consequences are the same.

“It is important to follow safety and traffic laws, and to understand how the substances you take can interfere with your ability to drive safely,” says Calello. “If you’re uncertain about whether a substance may impair your judgement or ability to drive, contact your doctor, local pharmacist, or the medical staff at your local poison control center to discuss known side effects. Poison control centers are a great resource for questions, emergencies, and information.”

New Jersey residents with poison-related questions or emergencies can contact the NJ Poison Control Center in the following ways: Call the Poison Help Hotline at 1-800-222-1222; Text 973-339-0702; Chat via the Poison Center’s [website](#). Do not wait until symptoms occur or spend time looking for medical information online. Contact your local poison control center for help 24/7. If someone is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up, or having a seizure, immediately call 9-1-1.

Stay connected on social: [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#)

**Help is Just a Phone Call Away!**

**Real People. Real Answers.**

---

---

**Available for Media Interviews**

Diane P. Calello, MD, Executive and Medical Director, New Jersey Poison Control Center, Rutgers NJ Medical School’s Department of Emergency Medicine

Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D., Managing Director, New Jersey Poison Control Center, Rutgers NJ Medical School’s Department of Emergency Medicine

Lewis S. Nelson, MD, Professor and Chair of Emergency Medicine at Rutgers NJ Medical School

**About New Jersey Poison Control Center / NJPIES, 1-800-222-1222**

Chartered in 1983, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES), known to the public as the New Jersey Poison Control Center, is the state’s primary defense against injury and deaths from intentional and unintentional poisonings. It is designated as the state’s regional poison control center by the New Jersey Department of Health and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It is a division of the Department of Emergency Medicine at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. NJPIES has a state-of-the-art center located at Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences in Newark. NJPIES is funded, in part, by the NJ Department of Health, NJ Hospitals and the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Hotline staff (physicians, registered nurses, and pharmacists) provide free, telemedicine consultation through hotline services (telephone, text, chat) regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention practices, drug interactions and overdoses, food poisoning, environmental chemical exposures, animal/insect bites and stings, plant and other outdoor exposures, carbon monoxide and lead poisonings, and more. NJPIES’ services are free, confidential/private, available 24/7, and help is available in any language. Call 1-800-222-1222; Text 973-339-0702; [Chat](#). Stay Connected: [FB](#) / [Twitter](#) / [Website](#)

**About Rutgers New Jersey Medical School**

Founded in 1954, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School is the oldest school of medicine in the state. Today it is part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and graduates approximately 170 physicians a year. In addition to providing the MD degree, the school offers MD/PhD, MD/MPH and MD/MBA degrees through collaborations with other institutions of higher education. Dedicated to excellence in education, research, clinical care and community outreach, the medical school comprises 20 academic departments and works with several healthcare partners, including its principal teaching hospital, University Hospital. Its faculty consists of numerous world-renowned scientists and many of the region’s “top doctors.” Home to the nation’s oldest student-run clinic, New Jersey Medical School hosts more than 50 centers and institutes, including the Public Health Research Institute Center, the Global Tuberculosis Institute and the Neurological Institute of New Jersey. For more information please visit: [njms.rutgers.edu](http://njms.rutgers.edu).

###