

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

## NEWS RELEASE

Media to contact:  
800-222-1222  
800-962-1253 if outside NJ

For Immediate Release  
May 29, 2019

### Alarming Trend in New Jersey

#### Preteen Suicide Attempts Increasing, Especially in Young Females

**(Newark, NJ)** – Since January 2018, one hundred New Jersey preteens have attempted suicide by drug overdose, according to the state’s poison center data. New Jersey Poison Center experts are frequently called to assist in the medical management of such devastating cases by both the public and healthcare facilities. “This trend should sound the alarms – we have young children attempting suicide by overdose at a rate which continues to increase,” says Diane P. Calello, MD, Executive and Medical Director of the [NJ Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School’s Department of Emergency Medicine](#).

Suicide Attempt Cases (male and female, January 2018 to present)

- 3 cases (9-year old)
- 7 cases (10-year old)
- 22 cases (11-year old)
- 68 cases (12-year old)

Since New Jersey law does not require hospitals/healthcare facilities to report drug overdoses to the poison center, these numbers likely capture only part of the picture. “Suicide in young preteens is becoming more and more common, signaling a real public health threat for our state,” warns Calello. “Our suicide attempt data also brings to light the fact that almost 80 percent of these cases were young females.”

The New Jersey Poison Center data is reflective of national statistics for adolescent suicide by poisoning (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31054768>). Most recently, research has suggested a 28% increase in suicide attempts in the month following the release of the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*, which chronicles one teen’s journey to a graphic death by suicide ([https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567\(19\)30288-6/fulltext](https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567(19)30288-6/fulltext)). While the authors cannot conclude the show caused these deaths, concerns have arisen about the potential for media to exert undue influence on preteen and adolescent behavior, especially if it fails to incorporate suicide prevention messaging.

Parents, caregivers, teachers, clergy, coaches, councilors and school administrators must heed the warning and be on the lookout for signs that a child is struggling and may be considering suicide. “Talking to your teens about identifying suicidal behaviors in peers is key. Often, a kid will express suicidal thoughts to friends through texts or on social media before taking their own life. Teaching our preteens and teens to speak up – right away – could be a critical life-saving intervention,” says Calello.

Of course, safe medication storage is essential as well. “We now know that keeping medicines up high and out of reach is not enough to prevent adolescent suicide,” says Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D., Managing Director

of the NJ Poison Control Center. "Keeping medicines (prescription, over-the-counter, dietary, herbal, vitamins) locked up when not in use is a start. We urge you to take advantage of federal and state Drug Take-Back Days, as well as, permanent medicine drop boxes in your area to rid your house of medicines you don't need. Teens will access medicines in their home for recreational use, but also for suicide."

**"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" — Benjamin Franklin**

If anyone, regardless of age, has concerns or questions about the safety of prescription, over-the-counter or street drugs, the experts at the New Jersey Poison Center are a phone call away, 1-800-222-1222. "Every minute counts in drug overdose situations so do not guess, make the call immediately. As a medical emergency and information-based resource, our priority is to ensure the health and well-being of all New Jersey residents without hesitation or bias," says Ruck. All calls to the poison center are confidential and free of charge.

**If someone is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up, or seizing, call 9-1-1 immediately.**

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

Stay Connected: Facebook ([@NJPIES](#)) and Twitter ([@NJPoisonCenter](#)) for breaking news, safety tips, trivia questions, etc.

**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

#### **About NJPIES**

Chartered in 1983, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES) is New Jersey's only poison control center. Medical professionals such as physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer free consultation through hotline services (telephone, text and chat) regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention, drugs, food poisoning, animal bites and more. In addition, it tracks incidences of adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines in order to monitor potential public health issues and provide data to the New Jersey Department of Health, U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NJPIES' confidential services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. When needed, NJPIES responds to other emergent health issues by expanding hotline services.

NJPIES 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 of Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. NJPIES has a state-of-the-art center located at Rutgers 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.

New Jersey residents should save the Poison Help number, 1-800-222-1222, in their mobile phones and post the number somewhere visible in their home. NJPIES is also available via text [8002221222@njpies.org](text:8002221222@njpies.org) and chat [www.njpies.org](http://www.njpies.org).

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).

###