

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

NEWS RELEASE

Media to contact:
800-222-1222
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For Immediate Release
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New Jersey Poison Control Center Sees Large Increase in Children with Edible Marijuana Exposure: Poison Center Cautions About Candy Look-Alikes

(New Jersey, NJ) – This week, a pre-teen was admitted to a NJ hospital experiencing adverse health effects after ingesting a large quantity of candy containing marijuana. The candy ([Medicated Sour Skittles](#)) was packaged almost identically to the popular and widely sold name brand candy. A month before this incident, a similar case occurred but in a young child. In this case, the 3-year-old needed to be admitted to the ICU, after eating a cannabis candy which looked identical to a Nerds Rope, another favorite to candy consumers.

Although New Jersey is on the brink of a large-scale rollout of recreational marijuana products for adults, it is important to remember that marijuana can and does have toxic effects on children. As witnessed in other states with recreational marijuana programs, pediatric exposures to these products increase as edibles become widely available. Poison Control Centers around the country have seen a significant increase in calls regarding children who accidentally eaten/swallowed products containing THC. Further complicating matters are candy look-alike products, such as gummy bears or the products mentioned above, which are very enticing to kids.

In 2020, the New Jersey Poison Control Center assisted in the medical treatment of more than 55 children under the age of 5, and more than 30 children between the ages of 6 and 12 who consumed edible products containing THC – more than double those assisted in the previous year (2019) and 6 times as much as in 2018.

The New Jersey Poison Control Center is warning the public to keep marijuana edibles in a secure/locked place in their homes. Children who ingest edibles are at high risk for marijuana overdose, which can lead to severe health effects.

“It is difficult for anyone, especially children, to distinguish an edible marijuana product from food when the packaging is almost identical to common everyday products,” says Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Department of Emergency Medicine](#). “For this reason, it’s important to safely store these products in the home. It’s also time to say – does that edible product really need to look that much like a favorite candy? Is it worth the risk?”

“Since edibles may be highly concentrated, limit the number of edibles you have at home if you live with young and school-aged children,” says Lewis Nelson, chair of Emergency Medicine at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. Many edible products look and taste like store-bought treats and other food products, making it difficult for children to know the difference. Although edibles like brownies, gummies, and lollipops can be fun and/or therapeutic for adults, high levels of THC (the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana), can lead to dangerous overdose symptoms in small children.”

Unlike in adults, marijuana exposure in children can lead to dangerous side including trouble breathing, loss of coordination, drowsiness, and seizures. In severe cases, children may need to be admitted to an intensive care unit and even need a ventilator.

When using or storing marijuana products in the home remember the following tips to prevent accidental exposure:

- Store edible products in a secure/locked place in the home, out of sight and reach of children and pets.
- Marijuana products can also cause severe health effects in pets.
- Limit the amount/number of edible products you have in the house at one time.
- Be aware of the potency (concentration of tetrahydrocannabinol/THC) of the edibles you have at home.
- The effects of edible marijuana may be delayed and more severe hours later.

If you suspect a poisoning involving a marijuana product, call your local poison control center immediately at 1-800-222-1222 for medical treatment advice. Poison Control Centers are staffed by healthcare professionals 24/7. If someone is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up, or having a seizure, immediately call 9-1-1.

New Jersey residents can reach their poison control center: Call (1-800-222-1222); Text (973-339-0702); Chat via [website](#).

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

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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.

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