



The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System

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Designated regional poison center
for New Jersey by New Jersey
Department of Health and Senior
Services and the American
Association of Poison Control
Centers

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WARNING

Wild Mushrooms May Look Innocent But May Prove To Be Deadly

Mushrooms are popular in today's cuisine. It is not uncommon for individuals to forage for wild mushrooms. A number of these foragers are newcomers to the United States. Newcomers to this country often do not realize that what may look identical to an edible mushroom found in their native country may be a TOXIC species here. In fact, wrongly identified mushrooms may be very poisonous and can prove to be DEADLY. Some symptoms of severe mushroom poisoning include intense vomiting and diarrhea, damage to vital organs, and even death.

According to Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D. of the NJ Poison Control Center, last year at this time we had one death and several patients hospitalized after picking mushrooms and making them into a stew. Unfortunately, the mushrooms picked were extremely toxic.

There is no easy way to tell the difference between poisonous and harmless mushrooms. Many kinds of edible mushrooms have toxic "look-alikes." Additionally, poisonous and non-poisonous mushrooms can grow side by side. Citizens should be warned NEVER to pick and consume any wild mushrooms unless they are well-trained and experienced in identifying local fungi. Even experienced mushroom pickers can be fooled at times, so this warning needs to be given and taken seriously. Children must be taught never to put natural products such as berries, nuts, or mushrooms into their mouths. Discoveries of such items of the natural world are opportunities for enjoyment, wonder, and education concerning personal safety.

The wet spring of 2009, followed by intermittent dry periods and wet periods over the summer has led to the prediction that there may be an approaching "perfect storm" for mushroom growth and, thus, for more opportunity for exposure. According to Dr. Ruck, the poison control center has already received over 60 calls relating to suspect mushroom ingestions since April.

What to do: If an exposure occurs to a child out of doors, remove any remaining parts of the mushroom from the child's mouth right away and place those fragments and all mushrooms that are in the immediate vicinity of the incident into one or more paper bags (NOT plastic!). **IMMEDIATELY** call the NJ Poison Control Center's Help Hotline at 1-800-222-1222. The center will arrange with an expert to try to identify the mushroom and provide advice on management depending on the mushroom's identification. A digital photograph should be taken of the mushroom(s) in question. It helps to take a picture of the mushroom next to other objects such as a coin, ruler, etc. to provide a sense of scale.

In the case of exposure to one or more persons from a prepared meal, **IMMEDIATELY** call the NJ Poison Control Center's Help Hotline at 1-800-222-1222. Place all uncooked mushrooms into a paper bag or bags. Save the cooked food containing mushrooms for analysis. In addition to preserving this material, the two most important items to record are the time the mushrooms were eaten and the time at which the first symptoms of poisoning appeared. The delay between eating and the appearance of symptoms is of great aid in identifying the poison or poisons involved. As in the previous case, digital photographs of uncooked mushrooms and/or fragments of mushrooms with an object to give scale can be very helpful in expert identification.

Mycologists have a favorite saying, "There are old mushroom pickers, and there are bold mushroom pickers, but there are no old, bold mushroom pickers!" **DO NOT TAKE CHANCES. DO NOT** wait until symptoms appear if exposure is suspected. The center is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls are free and confidential.

Remember Help Is Just A Phone Call Away! 1-800-222-1222

located at University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey

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