



The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System

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

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Date: June 1, 2011
Contact: Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D., DABAT
973-972-9280

WARNING

Wild Mushrooms May Look Innocent But May Prove To Be Deadly

With the warm wet weather, wild mushrooms are popping up all over. According to Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D. of the NJ Poison Control Center, the volume of calls to the NJ Poison Center about mushroom exposures this spring has been far greater than in past years. Each year, several NJ residents end up hospitalized, and, occasionally there is a death, after eating wild, picked mushrooms that were thought to be edible.

Mushrooms are popular in today's cuisine. It is not uncommon for individuals to forage for wild mushrooms. Many such foragers are newcomers to the United States. They do not realize that what may look identical to an edible mushroom 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.

Two years ago, one woman died and several other patients were hospitalized after picking wild 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 wild plants, 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.

What to do if an exposure occurs; remove any remaining parts of the mushroom from the victim's mouth 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 for an expert to identify the mushroom and the center can then 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.



140 Bergen Street, PO Box 1709, Suite G1600, Newark, NJ 07101-1709
Telephone: 973-972-9280 • Fax: 973-643-2679
www.njpies.org • www.facebook.com/njpies

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.

Remember, "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