



MUSHROOMS GROWN IN THE WILD CAN BE DEADLY



More than 5,000 species of mushrooms grow in the United States. Of these, about 100 are poisonous and a dozen are considered lethal. Most poison-related deaths result from people consuming mushrooms belonging to the genus *Amanita* – Death Caps, Destroying Angels and Fool’s Mushroom – which can easily be mistaken for nonpoisonous varieties.

Mushrooms growing in New Jersey may look like edible varieties from other parts of the country or world, but are actually toxic. Poisonous mushrooms grow on yards, lawns, fields and on the forest floor. Often the victim of mushroom toxin is a traveler or immigrant who sees a mushroom that looks very similar to a mushroom that was edible in the person’s country of origin but is toxic in the U.S. **West Windsor Health Department urges residents to share this information with family and friends, especially those visiting from other countries.**

It is extremely difficult to distinguish a safe mushroom from a toxic one. Folk traditions that claim toxic mushrooms can be identified by color, taste or shape **are false**. Cooking or drying does not destroy the toxins. Only a specialist can accurately determine mushroom species.

Illness from mushroom poisoning can appear as soon as 20 minutes or up to a few days after consumption. Symptoms may include intense vomiting, cramps and diarrhea, possible liver and kidney damage or death. Eating even a few bites of certain mushrooms can cause severe illness

Nationwide, poison control centers answer more than 6,000 calls annually regarding the consumption of poison mushrooms. Of these cases, about 2,500 are treated in health care facilities, with more than 500 cases resulting in serious illness. Last year, New Jersey Poison Control fielded 141 calls about potential poisonings, 41 of which led to hospital treatment. In recent years, there have been several deaths of animals and humans reported.

Most troubling to poison control experts is the fact that foraging – often by those without expertise – is growing in mainstream popularity. The increasing interest in foraging may be due to the rise of the locovore movement, which promotes eating locally sourced foods. But unless you are a mycologist, it is difficult to tell the difference between a poisonous and non-poisonous mushroom.

If you are thinking of foraging for mushrooms - **DON’T DO IT! It could be a matter of life and death!**

For more information contact West Windsor Township Health Department at 609-936-8400. **Emergency information is available through NJ Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222.**

West Windsor Township Health Department



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