

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

## NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release  
October 13, 2021

### **NJ Residents Develop Severe Liver Injuries After Foraging for Wild Mushrooms**

#### Dangers of Mushroom Season

**Update: Eating mushrooms growing in the wild—lawns, gardens, fields, woods, along roadways and trails— has caused some NJ residents to experience harmful health effects. Since issuing an advisory in August 2021 warning about a dangerous mushroom season, the NJ Poison Control Center has assisted 29 people and four pets with exposures to wild mushrooms. Of those exposed, at least two residents were hospitalized with life-threatening liver toxicity.**

(New Jersey) – The summer’s hot, humid, and wet weather were the perfect conditions for a dangerous wild mushroom season. Each year the medical professionals at the NJ Poison Control Center assist with cases of mushroom exposure and poisoning. Poisoning results from eating toxic species of wild mushrooms. Sadly, some cases result in hospitalizations and even deaths. Symptoms of mushroom poisoning include intense vomiting and diarrhea, dehydration, and damage to vital organs like the liver.

“Make no mistake, eating the wrong species of mushroom can result in devastating health effects,” says Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the [New Jersey Poison Control Center](#) at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Department of Emergency Medicine](#). “Mistaken identity is a significant risk of picking wild mushrooms. Many edible mushrooms growing in the wild have toxic look-alikes. It can be extremely difficult to tell an edible species of mushroom from a toxic one as they can look identical.”

Mushroom poisoning is a preventable injury — do not eat wild mushrooms unless they’ve been identified as safe to eat by a mushroom expert. Picking and eating wild mushrooms growing in gardens/fields, on lawns or in the woods is a dangerous game. Even experienced and expert mushroom pickers are fooled at times by toxic look-alikes.

Be skeptical of recipes online and in specialty cookbooks encouraging you to add adventurous twist to meals by picking (foraging) wild mushrooms. This suggestion poses an incredibly dangerous risk to the general public as they do not have the many years of education and experience needed to identify toxic look-alikes.

“If the recipe calls for foraging and you are not a mushroom expert, I strongly encourage you to use store-bought mushrooms,” says Calello. “The cooking process does not prevent the toxic health effects of

some mushrooms. Depending on the type of mushroom, eating even a few bites can cause serious health concerns. Our recommendation is it's unsafe for the general public to pick and eat mushrooms found in the wild, no matter the scenario."

Children and pets are especially at risk for mushroom poisoning, and should always be supervised when they're outdoors. They too can suffer serious injury and even death from eating a toxic wild mushroom. Teach children to ask an adult first before putting anything in their mouths.

In the event of a potential mushroom poisoning:

- Do not wait until symptoms appear or spend time looking for information online. It's important to get medical help immediately.
- Call your local poison control center at 1-800-222-1222 to get expert medical treatment advice. Poison center help is free, confidential and available 24/7. Your poison control center may arrange for an expert to identify the mushroom(s).
- Remove all pieces of the mushroom from the person's mouth. Put the pieces into a paper bag (NOT plastic). Also collect and bag all mushrooms growing near the one that was eaten. You may put all the mushrooms together in one paper bag or use two separate bags.
- Take a digital photograph 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 size.

Poison control centers are not only a great resource in the event of an emergency, but also for questions and concerns. New Jersey residents can contact the center's medical professionals in the following ways: Call the Poison Help Hotline at 1-800-222-1222; Text 973-339-0702; Chat via the Poison Center's [website](#).

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

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

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#### **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

Lewis S. Nelson, MD, Professor and Chair of Emergency Medicine at Rutgers NJ Medical School

#### **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](http://njms.rutgers.edu).

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