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Wild Mushrooms Can Kill, California Health Officer Warns

by [News Desk](#) | Nov 26, 2011

Wild, edible mushrooms are a delectable treat but California [issued a warning](#) earlier this week to people who forage for them.

Mistakes in wild mushroom identification can result in serious illness and even death, cautions Dr. Ron Chapman, director of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and State Public Health Officer.

"It is very difficult to distinguish which mushrooms are dangerous and which are safe to eat. Therefore, we recommend that wild mushrooms not be eaten unless they have been carefully examined and determined to be edible by a mushroom expert," Chapman said.

Wild mushroom poisoning continues to cause disease, hospitalization and death among California residents. According to the California Poison Control System (CPCS), 1,748 cases of mushroom ingestion were reported statewide in 2009-2010. Among those cases:

- Two people died.
- Ten people suffered a major health outcome, such as liver failure leading to coma and/or a liver transplant, or kidney failure requiring dialysis.
- 964 were children under six years of age. These incidents usually involved the child's eating a small amount of a mushroom growing in yards or neighborhood parks.
- 948 individuals were treated at a health care facility. • 19 were admitted to an intensive care unit.

The most serious illnesses and deaths have been linked primarily to mushrooms known to cause liver damage, including *Amanita ocreata*, or "destroying angel," and *Amanita phalloides*, also known as the "death cap," according to the California health department's warning. (Food Safety News readers have pointed out that the most common cause of non-fatal, but still serious, mushroom poisoning in the U.S. is consumption of *Chlorophyllum molybdites*.)

Amanita ocreata and *Amanita phalloides* and other poisonous mushrooms grow in some parts of California year-round, but are most commonly found during the fall, late winter or spring rainy seasons.

Eating poisonous mushrooms can cause abdominal pain, cramping, vomiting and diarrhea. Anyone developing such symptoms after eating wild mushrooms should seek immediate medical attention; the toxins can cause liver damage and death.

CPCS said people who develop abdominal symptoms after eating wild mushrooms, or their treating health care providers, should immediately contact the poison control center at 1-800-222-1222.

[Local mycological societies](#) offer educational resources about mushroom identification, and may be able to help individuals identify whether mushrooms they have picked are safe or not.

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