

# POISONology

SAFETY & FIRST AID TIPS FROM THE ARIZONA POISON AND DRUG INFORMATION CENTER

## Wild mushrooms: Tasty or toxic?



When Arizona has a lot of rain, mushrooms appear. As a result, the poison center receives an increase in the number of phone calls about people eating wild mushrooms. **Poisonous mushrooms are extremely difficult to distinguish from edible mushrooms.** Even the experienced mushroom picker can be fooled and pick a poisonous mushroom.

After eating a poisonous one, most people will develop nausea and vomiting within six hours. Other early symptoms include stomach cramps and watery or bloody diarrhea. It takes longer for symptoms to develop with some of the most poisonous mushrooms.

A unique feature of mushrooms in Arizona is that **between 3,500 to 4,000 feet elevation and above, mushrooms become more toxic.** Rather than just the gastrointestinal symptoms, these high-elevation fungi can have a severe toxic effect causing liver damage or failure problems.

Taste is not an indication of toxicity, and cooking does not destroy the poison; sometimes even a small bite can be poisonous. **All wild mushrooms must be considered unsafe to eat,** and prevention is the best defense against mushroom poisoning. To help prevent an unwanted experiment, teach your children never to eat a mushroom unless it is purchased at the grocery store. Destroy any wild mushroom around the house or garden.

If you suspect that someone has eaten a poisonous mushroom, call the poison center or your physician right away. **Do not wait for symptoms to occur.** The victim may need to be taken to an emergency room for observation and treatment. If you can, collect the remainder of any mushrooms that have been eaten, including the base, which may still be buried in the ground. If there is more than one variety at the location, collect a sample of each. Place the mushroom in a paper bag, basket or open container and take it to the emergency room with you. The samples should be kept cool, but do not freeze them, and do not use plastic containers or plastic bags, which cause mushrooms to spoil.

If the victim has vomited, collect the vomited material for proper identification. Quick reaction when someone has eaten a wild mushroom is the key to successful treatment of mushroom poisoning. **If the victim hasn't vomited, don't try to make them do so unless the poison center has told you to do this.**

*If you have other poisoning concerns or questions call the toll free national hotline at 1-800-222-1222 to reach your local poison center. If you live in Arizona outside of Maricopa County, this number will get you to our experts at the Arizona Poison and Drug Information Center in Tucson.*