



BC Centre for Disease Control
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

Fact Sheet: Wild Mushrooms May Be Poisonous

Are Wild Mushrooms Poisonous?

Some are. About 250 species of wild mushrooms found in North America are poisonous. Many more can cause varying degrees of adverse health effects. The BC Drug & Poison Information Centre reports on average 200 calls per year related to wild mushroom exposures.

Over one-quarter of the calls (27%) resulted in moderate, severe, or potential toxic illnesses.

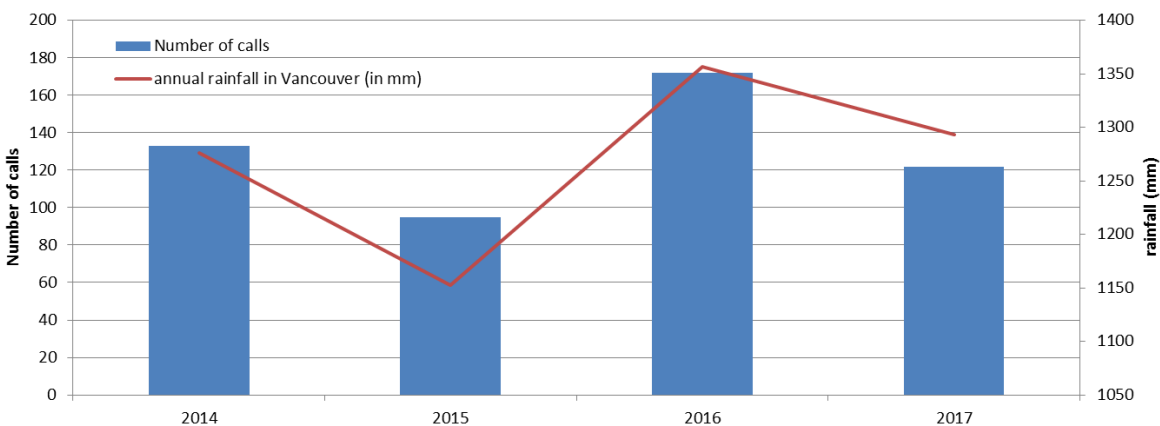
What are the Symptoms?

Mushroom poisonings may cause

nausea	vomiting	liver failure
hallucinations	seizure	coma
kidney failure		death

The severity of attack depends upon the type of mushroom, the amount consumed and sometimes the susceptibility of the individual to the poison.

Number of calls related to wild mushroom foraging in British Columbia



The Poison Information Centre notes increases in the number of calls from people who have become ill after eating wild mushrooms that were foraged (picked) outside. Calls increase following rainy periods that promote wild mushroom growth. Wild and potentially toxic mushrooms can be found on lawns, in parks, along roadsides, or in the forest. In the chart shown here, annual precipitation in Vancouver is shown for comparison.

Who Gets Sick?

Although half of all calls were parents concerned about toddlers accidentally ingesting wild mushrooms, very few young children became more than moderately ill.

Over 60% of tweens and teenagers under 19 intentionally ate wild mushrooms – likely to get high. While ~35% of adults also ate mushrooms to get high, the majority – over 60% –

mistakenly harvested poisonous mushrooms as an edible type.

In 2016, a toddler in BC died from eating a meal of harvested toxic wild mushrooms.



Death cap mushroom: *Amanita phalloides*

What to do if you or your child has eaten a wild mushroom

Phone the BC Drug and Poison Information Centre:
604.682.5050 or
toll free at 1.800.567.8911

Teenagers and adults, however, exposed to a larger amount of TOXIC mushrooms from *either trying to get high or harvesting and eating the wrong types of mushrooms accounted for 85% of the more severe illnesses* (see pie chart at right).

Remove the mushroom from the child's mouth and hands. Keep the leftover mushroom, or find a similar type for identification when describing it to poison information specialists. They can advise you on first aid treatment and whether you need to seek out immediate medical help.

How Do I Protect Myself?

Buy mushrooms from a retail store that receives their mushrooms from a commercial grower. This is the surest way to ensure your safety.

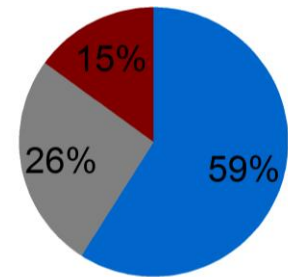
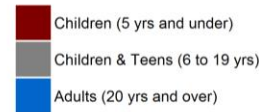
Be cautious about buying wild mushrooms from street vendors, farmers markets, non-approved retailers or other sources that cannot verify their knowledge and source of the mushrooms. Selling wild mushrooms is an unregulated industry in Canada.

Harvesting your own Wild Mushrooms

In some cases identifying the poisonous species is difficult even for the experts. So, only harvest wild mushrooms if you are absolutely certain they are safe. Be prepared to identify the mushrooms with the help of a good field guide or knowledgeable friend.

Store harvested mushrooms in paper (not plastic) bags at cool temperatures.

Age groups with moderate, severe and potentially toxic wild mushroom exposures (BC data Oct 2014 - Sept 2016)



Become knowledgeable with regards to mushroom terminology and take no risks when harvesting a mushroom for consumption. Should a mushroom not match even one of the characteristics listed in your field guide for an edible species, **don't eat it!**

You also cannot identify poisonous mushrooms by taste or smell – it has been reported that some poisonous mushrooms actually taste good!

Are Pictures Useful?

Only to a limited extent. Edible mushrooms may have poisonous look-a-likes, and many species have yet to be identified. In some poisonings, patients have stated that the mushroom looked like the picture of an edible mushroom.

How Do I Protect My Children?

This isn't easy. Young children tend to put anything and everything in their mouths. Check outdoor play areas and remove any mushrooms before allowing the children to play outside. Talk to teenagers about the dangers of ingesting wild mushrooms to get high – and what to do if someone has a bad reaction.

Environmental Health Services

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