



Seasonal Health Alert: Mushroom Safety

Opportunities for gathering and consuming mushrooms in the Pacific Northwest are abundant, and many mushrooms are considered delicacies. But **some mushrooms are poisonous and can cause severe illness or even death**. Before venturing out to mushroom forage, it's important to learn about mushroom safety. Here are some tips from the Washington Poison Center and Puget Sound Mycological Society:

In order to be edible, mushrooms must be:

1. **Identified with certainty:** there is no shortcut. The name of the mushroom must be known. Keep in mind that many mushrooms look similar and can be difficult to tell apart. Do not only rely on local field guides or online forums for identification—it is best to learn to identify mushrooms under the guidance of local experts (i.e., field experience).
2. **Tolerated by most people:** some field guides will pass on the experience of people who have eaten a particular species. No edible mushroom is tolerated by 100% of all people.
3. **Found in a wholesome environment:** mushrooms can absorb herbicides, pesticides, and heavy metals. Avoid gathering in areas that are sprayed, near roads or industrial areas.
4. **Fresh:** rotten or damaged mushrooms should not be eaten. Do not store your mushrooms in plastic bags or wrap. Keep them cool, and store them in paper bags.
5. **Cooked:** heat makes some mushrooms more digestible. It may also vaporize or reduce the potency of some toxins. Some mushroom poisons are not destroyed by cooking.
6. **Eaten in reasonable quantities:** some mushrooms are safe to eat in small portions, but are troublesome when overeaten. Start small before increasing quantities of one mushroom, do not mix species, and do not overindulge.
7. **Eaten by healthy adults:** children, older adults, and people who are already ill may be sickened by mushrooms that are edible by others.

ONLY try one type of foraged mushroom that is new to you at a time.

Symptoms of mushroom poisoning include:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- In severe cases, seizures, kidney and liver failure

To learn more about mushroom identification:

The Puget Sound Mycological Society can help identify mushrooms. Email photos of the mushrooms to ld@psms.org. Learn more at: www.psms.org.

Call 911 if someone has ingested a mushroom and is experiencing difficulty breathing, swelling in or around the mouth or face, or loss of consciousness.