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## **Unfriendly Fungi: Mushrooms May Cause Poisonings** *Illinois Poison Center experts warn of mushroom dangers*

(Chicago) – Illinois residents will soon see mushrooms popping up in their neighborhoods and nearby forest preserves as the cool, damp weather of fall sets in. Illinois Poison Center experts warn that touching or eating these wild mushrooms may be very dangerous, possibly even deadly.

"The Illinois Poison Center receives hundreds of calls each year regarding mushrooms found in people's lawns and neighborhood parks," explained Dr. Michael Wahl, managing medical director, IPC. "These mushrooms can be very poisonous and people should never eat them."

### **Health risks associated with mushrooms**

Certain mushrooms, such as the false morel, may cause vomiting, stomach cramps and bloody diarrhea. More serious signs of poisoning may include seizures, coma and death. Other mushrooms, such as the Psilocybe species, contain a hallucinogen. People who have eaten these mushrooms suffered from vivid hallucinations and flashbacks.

Mushrooms in the Amanita family are the most poisonous and are responsible for most of the mushroom-related deaths that occur each year. These mushrooms can cause liver damage; however, they do not produce symptoms until many hours after they are eaten. This can result in delayed treatment and adverse outcomes. That is why it is critical not to wait for symptoms to appear; if a poisoning is suspected, call the poison center at 1-800-222-1222 immediately.

Each individual may experience symptoms differently, and as with most poisons, symptoms experienced will depend on many factors, such as age, weight, amount consumed, etc.

### **Identifying poisonous mushrooms**

Mushroom identification is extremely difficult and complex and is best left to the experts, who are known as mycologists. The Illinois Poison Center recommends not eating any wild mushroom unless you are 100 percent sure that is not poisonous.

### **What to Do in an Emergency**

If you or someone you know may have eaten a potentially poisonous mushroom, call the Illinois Poison Center immediately at 1-800-222-1222. Collect the mushroom in question and carefully dig up a few additional mushrooms, complete with underground parts, to help with the identification. If there is more than one kind of

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mushroom in the area, collect all of the different types. Note if the mushroom was growing on wood, soil or other material, or if it was growing alone or in clusters. If possible, take a digital photo of the mushroom to send to the IPC center staff. Using the digital images, the poison center staff consults with expert mycologists in different parts of the state to obtain an initial identification of the mushroom, helping IPC staff make appropriate treatment recommendations.

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**Editor's Note:** Poison center experts are available for news media interviews. Contact IPC public affairs at 312-906-6146 to arrange an interview.

The Illinois Poison Center serves all of Illinois – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – via a national, toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222. Staffed by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and poison information providers, the IPC provides poison prevention information and treatment advice on household products, medication issues, alcohol and drug misuse, bites and stings and other poisonings.

The IPC is a program of the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, an association comprising more than 140 hospitals and health care organizations working together to improve the delivery of health care services in the Chicago area.