FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Fall’s Mushrooms Pose Poisoning Risk
Illinois Poison Center Receives Several Toxic Mushroom Cases

Mushrooms are popping up in neighborhoods and nearby forest preserves but you may want to think twice before eating them. In September, the Illinois Poison Center received several mushroom poisoning cases across the state. The victims underwent hospital evaluations for potentially life threatening symptoms after eating mushrooms from their backyard or forest. Poison experts warn that eating certain wild mushrooms may be very dangerous and potentially deadly.

"The Illinois Poison Center receives hundreds of calls each year regarding mushrooms found in people’s lawns and neighborhood parks," said Dr. Michael Wahl, managing medical director of the Illinois Poison Center. "Most of these mushrooms are minimally to moderately toxic but in rare cases they can be very poisonous."

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 can experience hallucinations and altered perceptions of reality.

Several mushroom types contain amitoxin, a potent liver poison that is responsible for the most mushroom related deaths every year. These mushrooms can cause liver damage and may 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 and amount consumed.

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 does not recommend eating any wild mushroom.

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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.

Assisting in Identifying a Mushroom:

- 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 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 alone or in clusters.
- Take a digital photo of the mushroom. The pictures will better assist the poison specialist’s consult with expert mycologists in the state to obtain an initial identification of the mushroom. In addition, it will help the IPC make appropriate treatment recommendations.

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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, a membership and service organization dedicated to helping members care for their communities through access to health care and improved delivery of services.