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Spike in wild mushroom poisonings prompts warning

The NSW Poisons Information Centre is cautioning people to avoid eating wild mushrooms after a recent spike in reported poisonings from the deadly fungi.

Genevieve Adamo, Co-Head of the NSW Poisons Information Centre, cautioned people against eating wild mushrooms after eight poisoning hospitalisations and 39 mushroom ingestion-related calls to the NSW Poisons Information Centre in one week.

Ms Adamo said five of the people were hospitalised from intentional eating of mushrooms foraged from fields.

“Recent rains in NSW have brought about excellent growing conditions for wild mushrooms. But it is difficult for most people to recognise edible from poisonous mushrooms,” Ms Adamo said.

“If not properly identified, mushrooms picked in the wild can make you very ill and could be lethal, so people should only eat shop-bought mushrooms. Cooking or boiling wild mushrooms does not make them safe to eat.

“Poisonous mushroom can cause severe abdominal pains, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, sweating, confusion and hallucinations. Some varieties of mushrooms can cause severe kidney and liver damage, and some can be fatal.”

In Australia there are some poisonous wild mushrooms that look similar to edible wild mushrooms found in Asia or Europe.

“There are many mushroom species growing in the wild including the Death Cap mushroom for example, which can cause serious poisoning, and potentially fatal organ damage,” Ms Adamo said.

“There is no reliable way to identify mushrooms picked in the wild, so it’s best to avoid eating them completely. It is simply not worth the risk.”

In 2018, there were 218 calls to the Poisons Information Centre about wild mushroom exposure, and 70 people were hospitalised from poisoning.

Anyone who ingests wild mushrooms should contact the Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26) immediately, even if they are completely well as symptoms can be delayed in onset and early treatment is vital.

In an emergency, people should call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance or seek medical treatment through their doctor or local hospital emergency department.

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