

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

May 26, 2011

**Rebecca Burns,
Environmental Health Services Director**

517-279-9561, ext. 143

Theresa Christner, Health Ed./Health Promotion Dir.

517-279-9561, ext. 144

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Remember: An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Morels!

Foraging the forest in search of morel mushrooms can be great fun! But if you are an inexperienced mushroom hunter, it can lead to a stay in the hospital. Children's Hospital of Michigan Poison Control Center (PCC) has reported ten patients hospitalized this spring due to toxicity caused by eating "false morel" mushrooms.

False morels, including the *Beefsteak* and *Early Morel* mushrooms, contain a substance called gyromitrin which is toxic to the liver. Once ingested, illness usually occurs within 6 to 48 hours. Symptoms include: nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea, dizziness, headache, muscle cramps, bloating, and fatigue. Untreated, people may develop confusion, delirium, seizures and coma. The gyromitrin toxin can lead to pain on the right side of the body, hepatitis and jaundice (yellow skin). These symptoms can appear within 48 hours. In serious cases, the toxin can cause increased bruising and bleeding due to loss of blood clotting factors.

While overeating "true morels" or eating them raw, undercooked or with alcoholic beverages, may make you ill, the severity of the illness is less intense. Illness from eating true morel mushrooms begins within a few hours and may include nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain lasting less than 24 hours.

According to Rebecca Burns, Environmental Health Director at the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, "The Morel is one of the easiest mushrooms to identify in the woods but care and caution should always be taken when out in the woods hunting any type of wild mushroom. You should always go with an experienced hunter first to help you identify which mushrooms are safe."



“True” Morel mushroom

The surface of a morel is covered with definite pits and ridges, and the bottom edge of the cap is attached directly to the stem. Cut lengthwise, the mushroom will be hollow from bottom of stem to top of cap. Cap and stalk are one piece. Size: 2" to 12" tall.

In contrast, the Beefsteak mushroom has wrinkled caps that are brain-like in appearance when mature. When immature, they may be smooth or saddle-shaped. They are never pitted or ridged. It is not hollow, though there may be air pockets within the flesh. As the mushroom gets older, the ridges and lobes darken to nearly black.



Michigan “Beefsteak” mushroom

“Early” Morels look like a “True” Morel, but its cap hangs around the stem (“thimble cap”). The stem is joined at the top of the cap. The entire fruiting body is a single hollow cavity. *This mushroom* also contains the toxin gyromitrin and is poisonous.



“Early” Morel mushrooms

If you suspect that you have eaten a false morel and/ or develop symptoms, please see your local physician or contact the Poison Control Center (PCC) at 1-800-222-1222. The PCC can accept emailed pictures for mushroom identification and can provide advice for treatment. To learn more about “False Morel” mushrooms, go to www.bhsj.org.

###