



UNCLASSIFIED

To: Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health
Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education

Through: Rebecca Cross, Director-General

Subject: Death Cap Mushroom incident

- On 26 April 2022, a two-year-old child was taken to Canberra Hospital Emergency Department after being found with a mushroom that they may have ingested from a garden at the Communities at Work's Isabella Plains Child Care and Education Centre Early Childhood Centre in Isabella Plains.
- A mycologist confirmed that the specimen that was taken to the hospital with the child was a death cap mushroom.
- The hospital notified the Communicable Disease Control (CDC) on-call Officer.
- ACT Health contacted the Education Directorate to notify them of the incident and to seek an out of hours contact for the early childhood centre manager.
- The manager was contacted by CDC to advise them to not allow any children or staff to enter the garden on the following day until officers could visit the site.
- The child was reported to be an inpatient under the paediatric team and to be clinically stable on the afternoon of 27 April 2022.
- An acute response team was convened on 27 April to coordinate actions between key stakeholders across the Health and Education Directorates and Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS).
- An Invasive Plant and Invertebrate Pest Officer from TCCS visited the site on 27 April. The officer found one damaged Death Cap Mushroom in the grounds of the early childhood centre, which they removed.
- TCCS also removed 37 Death Cap mushrooms from the nature strip in front of the centre.
- The TCCS officer provided advice to the early childhood centre, including monitoring and safe disposal of any further mushroom growth within their grounds. The centre will be responsible for monitoring their own private land.
- TCCS will erect warning signs on the nature strip today and will continue to monitor the site with weekly inspections.
- The TCCS officer noted that the area of the early childhood centre where the mushroom was found is near a wire fence that adjoins a primary school (Isabella Plains Primary School). The officer could not see any mushrooms growing on the other side of the fence.

- The Education Directorate will liaise with the primary school about the need to do an inspection and risk assessment of their grounds.
- The Chief Health Officer will issue a Public Health Alert regarding death cap mushrooms today (April 27 2022).
- The Education Directorate will communicate with all early childhood and education centres to ensure they are aware of the Public Health Alert, and to remind them to regularly inspect their outdoor play areas.
- A separate incident occurred on 18 March 2022, when a young child ingested a death cap mushroom in the yard at their private home. That child was admitted, monitored and subsequently discharged from hospital.

Background

- The death cap mushroom is a deadly poisonous fungus. While death cap mushrooms often grow near established oak trees, they can also be found where no oak trees are evident.
- ACT Health is aware of four fatalities associated with death cap mushrooms in the ACT since the year 2000.
- Officers from Transport Canberra and City Services remove death cap mushrooms from public places and inspect known growing sites frequently during the peak growing season. They reported a high level of growth in March 2022. This has eased off, with lower numbers collected over recent weeks. Forecast rain might prompt further growth over coming weeks.
- The Chief Health Officer regularly issues Public Health Alerts and social media posts to raise community awareness of the dangers of Death Cap mushrooms.
- The Health Protection Service distributes information to raise community awareness during peak growing periods. Information is sent through the Capital Health Network, schools, tertiary education institutions and multicultural groups.
- Information on death cap mushrooms is available on the ACT Health Website including posters and flyers in multiple languages <https://www.health.act.gov.au/about-our-health-system/population-health/fact-sheets>. The Communications and Engagement team are helping Health Protection Service to review current community engagement measures.

Talking Points

- On Tuesday 26 April a child presented to the Canberra Hospital Emergency Department after potential ingestion of a death cap mushroom. The mushroom was confirmed by a mycologist (Mushroom specialist) as a death cap mushroom.
- Due to health privacy laws, I am unable to provide specific details about individual patients.
- The incident took place at an Early Childhood Education and Care service. Public health professionals and officers from City Services acted quickly to ensure the area was secured and assessed for any further mushrooms.

- An officer from City Services inspected the site today and has provided advice on measures to prevent further incidents, including monitoring for further growth and safe disposal if this occurs.
- As the name suggests, death cap mushrooms can be deadly, and all parts of the mushroom are poisonous whether they have been cooked or not.
- If anyone suspects that they may have eaten a death cap mushroom, they should urgently seek medical attention at a hospital emergency department and take any remaining mushroom to the hospital for identification in a plastic bag or container.
- Symptoms of death cap mushroom poisoning generally occur 6-24 hours or more after eating these mushrooms, and include abdominal pains, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. These symptoms can progress to liver failure and death.
- After being notified about this incident, the Chief Health Officer has issued a Public Health Alert.
- This case serves as a reminder that Death Cap mushrooms grow in many locations across the Canberra region, in public places and on private property. They are usually found in late summer, through to autumn. However, recent years have shown that they can grow at any time of year, especially following heavy rainfall.
- City Services undertakes routine site inspections at known, high yielding sites in ACT public places during the peak growing season.
- ACT Health also routinely issues Public Health Alerts to the ACT community when Death Cap mushrooms are detected growing in the region.
- During peak growing periods, the Health Protection Service reminds hospital emergency departments, general practitioners, Walk-In Centres and the NSW Poisons Information Centre to be alert to possible Death Cap poisonings.
- Death caps mushrooms are easily mistaken for edible mushrooms, and cooking them does not make them safe.
- I would like to remind all Canberrans not to pick or eat any wild mushrooms. Eating wild mushrooms is just not worth the risk. Don't eat mushrooms you have found in the wild, and only purchase mushrooms from a reputable supplier.
- Death Cap mushrooms found growing in public places can be reported to Access Canberra on 13 22 81.
- If someone is concerned about wild mushrooms growing at their home, they should remove them using gloves or a tool and dispose of them inside a plastic bag or other sealed container with the household rubbish – ensuring that it cannot be accessed by children or pets.

Contact Officer: Dr Sally Singleton, Public Health Physician

Contact Number: [REDACTED]

Date: 27 April 2022

Noted/Please Discuss

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Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Minister for Health