

**EPI Update for Friday, April 16, 2010**  
**Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology**  
**Iowa Department of Public Health**

**Items for this week's EPI Update include:**

- ✍ **Pretty and poisonous!**
- ✍ **Avoiding raccoon roundworms**
- ✍ **Meeting announcements and training opportunities**

**Pretty and poisonous!**

After a long Midwest winter, children spend more time outdoors and will find many interesting things to investigate, including plants. A child swallowing a plant, mushroom, or berries is one of the top five reasons for calls to a poison control center.

Some of the most common plants used in our flower and vegetable gardens can be toxic to humans. Daffodil bulbs and Wisteria seeds can be poisonous if eaten. The leaves and stalks of Chrysanthemums can cause dermatitis (skin rash) upon contact. Lily of the valley, Foxglove, and Oleander are common plants that contain poisonous qualities affecting the heart.

Other common ornamental plants that top the most poisonous list include: Azalea, Glory lily, Hydrangea, Castor bean, Rhododendron, Jequirity bean, Jerusalem cherry, Rosary bean, Jimson weed, Larkspur, Daphne, St. John's wort, Death camas, English laurel, Morning glory, Elderberry, Deadly Nightshade, Wintersweet, and Yew berry.

Even your vegetable garden likely contains two plants that top the most poisonous list; tomatoes and potatoes are both members of the nightshade family. Leaves and stems of these plants are poisonous. Rhubarb leaves are also toxic to humans and animals when eaten. Most reported deaths from plants result from ingesting wild mushrooms.

To help prevent plant poisonings, follow these safety tips:

- ? Know the names of all plants in your home and yard. Identifying plants is best accomplished by bringing samples to a nursery or greenhouse.
- ? Determine if your plants are toxic by using the Iowa Statewide Poison Control Center's Plant Guide at [www.iowapoisson.org/index.asp?pageID=116](http://www.iowapoisson.org/index.asp?pageID=116) .
- ? Remove plants that are considered dangerous, especially if you have children or pets.
- ? Keep children away from plants with berries. Because of their color, shape, and texture, berries are very attractive to youngsters. Not only are they found on garden and wild plants, but toxic berries are common in dried flower arrangements.
- ? Do not eat wild plants or mushrooms unless you can expertly identify edible plants. Cooking poisonous plants does not make them safe to eat.
- ? Remove all mushrooms in the yard, especially after rainy spells in spring and fall. Identification of mushrooms growing in the yard is very time consuming, even for

experts; therefore, it is best to assume all varieties are toxic. It is important to call the Poison Control Center if *any* portion of a mushroom is ingested.

- ? Teach children to “ask first” before eating something from the garden.
- ? Call the Iowa Statewide Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 immediately if you think someone swallowed a part of a plant.

### **Avoiding raccoon roundworms**

*Baylisascaris*, an intestinal raccoon roundworm, can infect a variety of other animals, including humans. People become infected when they accidentally ingest eggs in soil, water, or objects contaminated with raccoon feces. Human infection can lead to visceral larval migrans, ocular larval migrans, or encephalitis.

Diagnosis is difficult and is often identified after symptoms become severe.

*Baylisascaris* should be suspected in cases of sudden onset of eosinophilic encephalitis with potential exposure to raccoon feces or contaminated soil. Treatment of the disease, once clinical signs are present, will likely not improve the outcome. Immediate prophylactic treatment is recommended in cases of probable exposure, such as children eating raccoon feces.

Prevent exposure by:

- ? Cleaning up raccoon feces carefully.
  - o Newly deposited eggs take at least two to four weeks to become infective, so prompt removal will reduce risk.
  - o To eliminate eggs, feces and material contaminated with raccoon feces should be removed and burned, buried, or sent to a landfill.
  - o Treat feces-soiled decks, patios, and other surfaces with boiling water.
  - o Avoid contaminating hands and clothes. Always wash hands well with soap and running water after any potential exposure to help reduce possible infection.
- ? Avoiding direct contact with raccoons. Do not keep, feed, or adopt raccoons as pets.
- ? Discouraging raccoons from around your home by:
  - o preventing access to food.
  - o keeping trash containers tightly closed.
  - o closing off access to attics and basements.
  - o keeping sand boxes covered at all times (to prevent it from becoming a latrine).
  - o minimizing water sources.
  - o clearing brush so raccoons are not likely to make a den on your property.
- ? Staying away from areas and materials that might be contaminated by raccoon feces.

For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/baylisascaris/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/baylisascaris/default.htm)

### **Meeting announcements and training opportunities**

None

**Have a healthy and happy week.**  
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