



Australian Prescriber



AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW

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BEWARE: DEATHCAP MUSHROOMS ON THE MOVE

A foreign invader has established a beachhead in the Australian Capital Territory and is now advancing southwards into Victoria. It is small, white to green-white and potentially fatal to its victims.

This particular alien is the deathcap mushroom (*Amanita phalloides*), thought to have been introduced to Australia from the USA attached to the roots of oak trees. Until now they have been found mainly in the ACT, but are spreading and examples have been reported in Victoria.

The latest edition of *Australian Prescriber* reports that eating a single deathcap mushroom can be fatal, with an overall mortality rate of 20 per cent.

There are no simple and effective treatments for deathcap poisoning. In some overseas cases the only effective treatment has been a liver transplant. The mushrooms contain a toxin called amatoxin that inhibits protein synthesis. Death can occur within seven to 10 days. Cooking, freezing or drying does not affect the toxin.

Authorities are concerned that community awareness of the dangers of deathcap mushrooms in Australia is low. In most cases of poisoning, the mushrooms have been picked in the wild and eaten by people who cannot tell the difference between deathcap and edible mushrooms.

Deathcap mushrooms are white to white-green with white gills and a cup at the base of the stem. People who are unable to tell the difference between them and edible mushrooms should never pick and eat wild mushrooms. For the full article including a picture of deathcap mushrooms see <http://www.australianprescriber.com/index.php?content=/magazines/vol23no2/mushroom.html>

Further information

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Australian Prescriber is a national independent review of therapeutic topics, designed to assist health professionals in their duties. The journal provides independent comment - no advertising is accepted. The current issue of Australian Prescriber also looks at new drugs for osteoarthritis, and the search for blood donors with anti-D antibodies.

For a copy of the complete article or information about *Australian Prescriber*, visit the homepage <http://www.australianprescriber.com> or contact 02 6289 7038 (ph); 02 6289 8641 (fax).