



BC Centre for Disease Control
AN AGENCY OF THE PROVINCIAL HEALTH SERVICES AUTHORITY

HEALTH ADVISORY

For Immediate Release
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RAW OR UNDERCOOKED FIDDLEHEADS CAN CAUSE ILLNESS

The B.C. Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) is reminding consumers that fresh fiddleheads must be properly cooked before being consumed. Fiddleheads are the young, curled, edible shoots of the Ostrich Fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*). They should not be harvested or consumed if they have opened beyond the tightly curled stage. Fiddleheads are harvested seasonally, and commonly from uncultivated lands. They are sold as a seasonal vegetable in retail grocers, outdoor markets, and restaurants. Fiddleheads may be served in soups, or cooked and served as a hot vegetable.

In the past, raw or undercooked fiddleheads have been associated with food borne illness. There have been two (2) incidents of illness recently reported in the Lower Mainland. Although no causative agent has yet been identified, it is believed that an unidentified natural toxin is responsible for the illness.

Symptoms of illness usually include nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, headache and diarrhea. Onset of symptoms can start within an hour of consumption and generally continue for 4 to 18 hours. Illness can result in dehydration, particularly among the elderly.

Proper Cooking technique is considered to effectively destroy the toxin and render fiddleheads safe to eat. The BCCDC is recommending that fresh fiddleheads be washed in several changes of cold water and cooked in boiling water for 15 minutes or steamed for 10 to 12 minutes until tender – do not eat them if they are still crunchy. Fiddleheads should also be fully cooked prior to sautéing, frying or baking. Lastly, water used for boiling or steaming fiddleheads should be discarded as it may contain the toxin.

Anyone experiencing severe or continued symptoms after consuming fiddleheads should seek medical attention. Cases of illness should be reported to the local health authority.

For more information, please contact your local health authority.

Contact Information:

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