



May 8, 2012

Health warning: Wash and cook fiddleheads to prevent illness

Residents of Toronto are being reminded to thoroughly wash and cook fiddleheads before they are consumed to avoid illness. Fiddleheads are curled, edible shoots of the ostrich fern and are commonly eaten at this time of year as a seasonal vegetable.

"Recently, five cases of illness associated with fiddleheads have been reported to Toronto Public Health. To prevent further illness in the community, it is important to thoroughly wash and cook fiddleheads before eating them," said Jim Chan, Food Safety Program Manager for Toronto Public Health.

Cases of temporary illness from eating raw or undercooked fiddleheads were first reported in 1994, and additional cases have been reported periodically since then across Canada. While the cause of this temporary illness is not known, Health Canada believes it is most likely the result of an unidentified natural toxin present in the fiddlehead.

Illness associated with consuming fiddleheads is uncommon. Symptoms of illness appear within 30 minutes to 12 hours of eating raw or undercooked fiddleheads and typically last for less than 24 hours but may last as long as three days. Symptoms may include diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps and headaches.

Fiddlehead food safety tips include:

- Never eat raw fiddleheads.
- Remove as much of the brown, papery husk as possible.
- Wash the fiddleheads well using fresh, cold water
- Cook fiddleheads by boiling them for 15 minutes or by steaming them for 10 to 12 minutes.
- Discard water used for boiling or steaming fiddleheads, as it may contain the toxin.

More information about how to safely enjoy fiddleheads can be found on Health Canada's website at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/kitchen-cuisine/fiddlehead-fougere-eng.php>.

People who believe that they may have become ill as a result of eating fiddleheads should contact Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 during business hours or after hours at 3-1-1, or see their family physician.

Toronto is Canada's largest city and sixth largest government, and home to a diverse population of about 2.7 million people. Toronto's government is dedicated to delivering customer service excellence, creating a transparent and accountable government, reducing the size and cost of government and building a transportation city. For information on non-emergency City services and programs, Toronto residents, businesses and visitors can dial 311, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Media Contacts:

Kris Scheuer

kscheue@toronto.ca