Here are some things you should do—and some things you should NOT do—to help your family prevent poisoning while fighting COVID-19.

- **Do** use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.

- **Do** supervise young children when using hand sanitizer so they do not swallow it.

- **Do** read the labels on your cleaning products. Use them only as directed. Wear gloves or eye protection if the label recommends it.

People are spending more time at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Families may be keeping larger-than-usual amounts of cleaning products, hand sanitizer, medicines, and other products in the house.

It is important to use these products to help control the spread of germs such as the COVID-19 virus. But calls to the poison center about exposures to hand sanitizer and cleaning products are on the rise. These products can make you sick when used in the wrong way.

**WILD MUSHROOMS: Myth vs. Fact**

“There are old mushroom hunters and there are bold mushroom hunters, but there are no old and bold mushroom hunters.” -source unknown

Plentiful summer rain means wild MUSHROOMS. Right now in central and southwest Virginia they are cropping up everywhere in a grand assortment of...
Do keep all medicines, cleaners, and disinfectants stored up high, out of the sight and reach of children. These products often look like candy or sweet beverages to children.

Do keep the Blue Ridge Poison Center programmed in your phone. Save the number, save a life: 1-800-222-1222.

Here are some things you should avoid:

- Don’t use hand sanitizer on large areas of your body. It is only safe to use on your hands.

- Don’t use hand sanitizer that may contain methanol, which could cause serious injuries. Check the list of unsafe products found to contain methanol at www.fda.gov.

- Don't swallow or gargle hand sanitizer or any cleaning product. This will not prevent a COVID-19 infection, and may cause illness.

- Don’t use household cleaning products on your skin. This could cause skin irritation or burns.

- Don't mix cleaning products together. This could create a poisonous gas.

Download a free one-page handout of these safety tips from our website. Print, post, or share in any way. English and Spanish versions available. Visit www.brpc.virginia.edu and choose “Free Materials” from the menu, or just click here.
colors, sizes, and shapes. Foraging, photographing, and identifying wild mushrooms are popular hobbies for outdoor enthusiasts. Some varieties are edible and delicious. But some varieties can make you very sick. Some are deadly. There is even a species of mushroom that will only make you sick if you eat it and also drink alcohol. The differences between wild mushroom species may be so subtle, even an experienced mycologist (mushroom scientist) can make a mistake.

Mushroom identification can be tricky. Comparing a wild mushroom to a picture may not help you pinpoint the exact species. Many subtle characteristics must be considered, including: color; the shape of the cap; the shape and color of the gills underneath the cap; how the cap attaches to the stalk; the appearance of the stalk (especially the very bottom part which is often underground); where the mushroom is growing and what other mushrooms or plants are nearby; the time of year; and the color of the dust-like spores (the ‘seeds’). To make matters even more complicated, these characteristics may change as the mushroom matures. **When in doubt, it is best not to eat what you have picked.**

Children are particularly at risk for mushroom poisoning. They may not understand that there is a difference between wild and store-bought mushrooms. [Note: Long ago, at age 4, this author fed little brown mushrooms growing in the back yard to my 2 year old brother...much to my parents’ horror. Luckily the mushrooms turned out to be harmless.]

It is important to watch young children closely when outdoors. Tell older children that they should never eat any plants, berries, or mushrooms they find growing wild outdoors until a trusted adult has identified them as edible.

Symptoms of mushroom poisoning may be delayed by hours or even days after eating, when the toxins have begun to attack the liver or other organs. Certain species can cause hallucinations, dizziness, drowsiness, dilated pupils, or muscle spasms. Other species cause severe vomiting, diarrhea, and sharp abdominal pain. The most dangerous species found in Virginia belong to the *Amanita* genus; even one bite can be life-threatening.

There are many myths about poisonous mushrooms. Beware of “old wives tales” and bad advice from inexperienced foragers.

**MYTH: Poisonous mushrooms always have bright, flashy colors.**

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**POISON TRIVIA ANSWER:** A-Castor bean plant (*Ricinus communis*), a showy perennial with large purple-green leaves and seed pods. Even though ricin is so toxic, accidental poisoning is extremely rare even when someone has swallowed a bean or two, as it takes quite a bit of processing to extract the poison from the beans. Nevertheless: keep the beans away from pets and children, and call the poison center if you suspect anyone has swallowed any beans.

Images L to R: Castor beans; castor bean plant
TRUTH: Some poisonous mushrooms are white or bland in color.

MYTH: Poisonous mushrooms taste terrible.
TRUTH: It is reported that some taste very good.

MYTH: Snails, insects, or other animals won’t eat poisonous mushrooms.
TRUTH: The poisonous compounds in mushrooms don’t affect all animals, including people, the same way.

MYTH: A poisonous mushroom will be safe to eat if you cook it enough.
TRUTH: Neither cooking, canning, freezing, or drying will make a poisonous mushroom safe to eat.

If you believe someone may have eaten an unsafe mushroom, contact the Blue Ridge Poison Center for guidance: 1-800-222-1222. Do not wait for symptoms to develop. If possible, try to collect a sample of what was eaten to help experts identify it.

Poisons Make You Sick, a children’s book by Dorothy Chlad. Visit the ‘Learning Center’ of our website at www.brpc.virginia.edu, or CLICK HERE. Stay tuned till the end for a bonus demonstration on look-alike poison dangers.

The U.S. Food and Drug Agency (FDA) announced recently that some hand sanitizer products have been found to contain methanol, a dangerous ingredient which could cause illness or injury when absorbed through the skin or swallowed. Methanol—or wood alcohol-- is NOT an approved or recommended ingredient for any sanitizing or disinfecting product. The FDA is performing an ongoing investigation into the problem.

Exposure to methanol can cause nausea, vomiting, headache, blurred vision, permanent blindness, seizures, coma, permanent damage to the nervous system and death. Children who accidently swallow these products and adolescents or adults who drink these products as an alcohol (ethanol) substitute are most at risk.

The FDA created a “Do not use” list of hand sanitizers found to contain methonal. The list is available on their website and is updated regularly. Go to www.fda.gov or CLICK HERE.