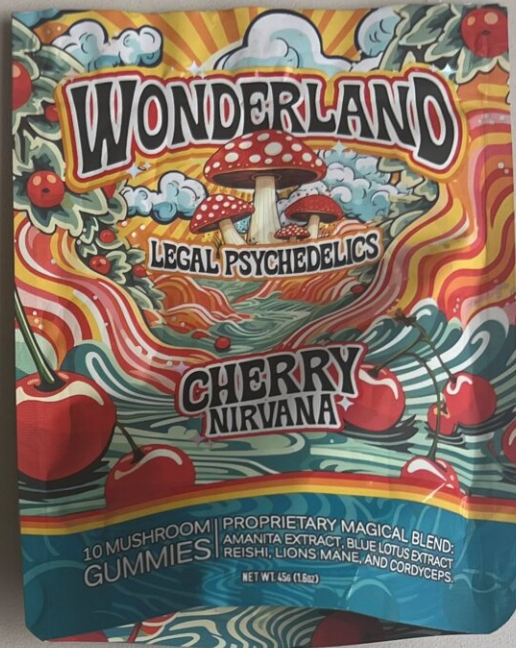


'Brain health' mushroom gummies found to contain illegal hallucinogens after five sickened

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Mushroom gummy packages. Credit: UVA Health

Mushroom gummies being sold to promote brain function may contain the illegal hallucinogen psilocybin and other harmful ingredients not listed on the label, UVA Health experts are warning after five people—including a 3-year-old child—were sickened.

A spate of cases seen in UVA Health Medical Center's emergency department between September and June prompted poison experts with UVA's Blue Ridge Poison Center to test five different brands of the products sold in Central Virginia gas stations and smoke shops.

The UVA team has detailed its findings in *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. The researchers included Michienzi, Jeremy Hamlin, Rita Farah and Bazydlo.

Of those, three contained psilocybin or psilocin, substances classified as "Schedule I" drugs by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, meaning they have no medical use and high potential for abuse. Psilocybin and psilocin are illegal at both the federal and state level.

All the products tested claimed to contain the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom, which is legal, or a proprietary mushroom blend. But none disclosed the inclusion of psilocybin or psilocin. Other undisclosed ingredients discovered by the UVA researchers included caffeine, ephedrine and kratom, an herb that produces opioid-like effects and carries the risk of addiction.

The presence of psilocybin and psilocin, as well as other undisclosed ingredients, represents a potential public health threat not just in Central Virginia but potentially across the country, the researchers say. They

warn that people who take unregulated products sold at smoke shops and gas stations have no way of knowing what they're putting into their bodies—or the harm the substances could cause.

"People tend to equate 'legal' with 'safe,' which is not necessarily the case. These products are not regulated and can contain any number of unlabeled substances which, when consumed, can cause undesired symptoms," said researcher Avery Michienzi, DO, the poison center's assistant medical director.

"Some packages will have QR codes showing that the products were tested in a lab and contain only what they are labeled to contain. These have been found to be inaccurate."

Effects of mushroom gummies

All four of the adults seen in UVA's Emergency Department between September and Nov. 20 had consumed the mushroom gummies intentionally. But the child, seen this June, had consumed two gummies accidentally. All were treated and released, but the child required an overnight hospital stay.

The researchers note that investigators were not able to purchase the exact brands of mushroom gummies the patients had consumed. Instead, they bought three brands with the same ingredients and two other brands that claimed to contain "mushroom nootropics." ("Nootropics" is a trendy term commonly used in advertising for substances that claim to improve cognition and brain health.)

The researchers then analyzed the gummies in UVA Health's advanced Toxicology Laboratory. "While we anticipated that we might find some undisclosed ingredients, we were surprised to find psilocybin and psilocin knowing that they are scheduled drugs," said Lindsay Bazydlo,

Ph.D., the lab's medical director. "The consumer should be given accurate information about what substances are included in these products."

The researchers are urging doctors to be on the lookout for patients, especially children, who have fallen ill after consuming the gummies. Typical hospital drug screens, they note, do not detect the [substances](#) the researchers found. Symptoms can include hallucinations, racing heartbeat, upset stomach and altered mental state. These symptoms can appear similar to the effects of marijuana.

More information: *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (2024).

Provided by University of Virginia

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