

## **Be Mindful of Flooded Areas When Hunting Morels**

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As morel mushroom hunting season approaches, be mindful of food safety. It's important to remember flood waters don't carry just water. There is a host of unsavory things that are downright dangerous—

- Human disease pathogens from raw sewage,
- Pesticides carried from farm fields and lawns on soil particles and plant residue,
- And rubber and petroleum products from cars, boats and farm equipment.

While there is NO washing technique that will completely remove all contaminants from morels, the heat from cooking them will likely kill human pathogenic bacteria and viruses. This is not true for pesticide and petroleum residues. These products can be harbored in the tiniest crevices and tissues of the morel and are extremely resistant to removal by washing. Since we can't know all of the contaminants flood waters carry, it is far safer not to eat morels gathered from flooded areas.

Morel mushroom hunters should take note of their usual gathering sites. High ground is going to be best for searching for morels as these sites are less likely to have been flooded. If corn stalks and grass are caught high around brush and fences, this is a clear indication the site was flooded and morels should not be gathered. Again, it's better to err on the side of food safety.

For those who have been gifted or have purchased morels, be sure to ask questions from the gatherer about where the morels came from. People with compromised immune systems, such as children, the elderly and those who are ill, are adversely affected by the flood water contaminants that morels can harbor.

Never use soap to clean morels. Instead use 2 tablespoons of bleach to one gallon of water for washing, followed by thorough rinsing with clean water.

While it is hard to miss out on this tasty spring treat, if we receive no more flooding, morel mushroom aficionados can expect gathering with no reservations next spring. For more flood resources, go to [flood.unl.edu](http://flood.unl.edu).