

Coroner urges regular advice on mushrooms

By KATHARYN BRINE

A coroner has recommended the ACT Government regularly publish warnings about wild poisonous mushrooms after finding an 88-year-old woman died after eating some picked from her back yard.

Coroner Phil Thompson found Elsa Matilda Oldenburg, of Watson, had died in the Canberra Hospital on May 3, three days after cooking an unknown quantity of death-cap mushrooms in a soup.

Her family said at the inquest yesterday she would regularly pick and cook mushrooms from her garden, and had known how to identify the dangerous ones.

She had been warned about death-cap mushrooms which had begun sprouting her yard, and family members had destroyed a small crop earlier in the season, warning her more would probably grow back.

They believed the only explanation was that Ms Oldenburg had picked the mushrooms at dusk and not realised which type they were. The spices and herbs in the soup would have masked their taste.

Mr Thompson found Ms Oldenburg had died of liver failure caused by death-cap mushroom poisoning.

He made a recommendation to Attorney-General Jon Stanhope that the public be regularly warned of the hazards of eating the wild mushrooms, which are commonly found in Canberra back yards.

It is believed to be the second death related to the species in the past 10 years. During the year, two other local people had also been treated for mushroom poisoning.

The death-cap, also known as *amanita phalloides*, is the world's most lethal mushroom. It has distinctive white gills under its cap.