



Community Health Advisory

July 7, 2025



Alert Categories



Community Health Alert

Conveys the highest level of importance; **warrants immediate action or attention.**



Community Health Advisory

Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; **may not require immediate action.**



Community Health Update

Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; **no immediate action necessary.**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Poison hemlock can be deadly

Questions regarding this information may be directed to:

Whitman County Public Health | Environmental Health Program | EH@whitmancounty.gov

Summary

Poison hemlock is a toxic plant that is currently blooming in Whitman County and surrounding areas. It is most often found in open sunny areas, fields, vacant lots, and on roadsides. Eating even a small amount of this plant can kill people, pets, livestock, and wildlife.

About This Plant

Poison hemlock, known as *Conium maculatum*, is a member of the carrot family. When mature, poison hemlock may grow 6–10 feet tall. It has white flowers and bright green, fern-like leaves. The stems are hairless, have purple to purple-red spots and streaks, and are hollow.



Pictured from left to right: A poison hemlock plant; a close-up of poison hemlock flowers; the leaf of a poison hemlock plant.

Why It's a Problem

Poison hemlock is toxic when ingested, even in small quantities. It contains toxic alkaloids which are found in all parts of the plant. The poison affects the nervous system of humans or animals that ingest the plant and may quickly lead to death due to respiratory or cardiac failure. There is no antidote for poison hemlock poisoning. Poison hemlock can be mistaken for many edible and ornamental members of the carrot family, such as parsley, parsnip, and wild carrot, so it is important to correctly identify a plant before ingesting it.

Requested Actions

- 1. Do not ingest any part of this plant.** All parts of the plant are poisonous when eaten. There is no known antidote for poison hemlock poisoning.
- 2. Learn more about disposing of noxious weeds.**
 - Wear gloves and protective clothing, such as long sleeves, pants and eye protection, when removing poison hemlock. Wash your hands and shower after poison hemlock removal.
 - Small patches of poison hemlock can be dug up, making sure to remove the taproot.
 - Do not cut or mow the plants, as the dust and fumes created may be toxic.
 - Herbicides are readily available and can be very effective. Be sure to follow the label carefully.
 - Remember the toxins will remain potent in dried plant material, so bag and trash dead plants.
 - Never put poison hemlock in the compost or leave them where children or livestock might eat them.
- 3. Be aware of look-alike plants.** Poison hemlock can be confused with many edible members of the parsley family including fennel, chervil and anise. Do not handle or eat unfamiliar plants you find outside. **To distinguish poison hemlock from other plants with fern-like leaves**, look for a

completely smooth (hairless) stem with purple or red spots and streaks. It also tends to emerge earlier in the growing season (March – April) than other similar plants.



Pictured: A close-up photo of the stem of a poison hemlock plant showing purple blotches.

Resources

For more information on poison hemlock, or for help identifying suspected poison hemlock, visit the following resources:

- King County Noxious Weed Control Program
- Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board
- Washington Invasive Species Council