



Essential Information for Healthcare Providers Agricultural Workers and Pesticides

Agricultural workers are at risk of pesticide exposure. Studies have shown that pesticide exposure can increase the risk of acute and chronic diseases including cancer, birth defects, and learning disabilities. Agricultural workers handling or in close contact with pesticides should be informed of the health risks posed by exposure for themselves and their families.



 Worker exposure to pesticides can occur during preparation and application, by drift from neighboring fields, or by contact with pesticide residues on crops, soil, or spraying equipment.

 Agricultural workers may bring pesticide residues home on their shoes and clothes exposing themselves and people living in their households. Pesticides can accumulate in house dust and remain on surfaces for a long period of time.

As a healthcare provider, you can teach your patients about limiting exposure to pesticides, and provide them with resources about their rights. It is also important to remain updated on ways to diagnose and treat over-exposed patients and be aware that California state law requires physicians to report known or suspected pesticide illnesses.

Start the Conversation With Your Patient

Begin by asking your patient about their work practices and potential occupational exposures to determine their risk level. Examples of questions you can ask your patient:

1. What kind of work do you do?
2. What are your specific job duties?
3. Do you handle or come in close contact with pesticides at work?
4. If so, do you use personal protective equipment at work when handling pesticides?
5. Do you take steps to prevent carrying pesticides from work into your home?

Learn More

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Recognition & Management of Pesticide Poisonings: 6th Edition

This [manual](#) is a quick reference resource for physicians with toxicology and treatment information for particular pesticide exposures, and guidelines for conducting environmental and occupational screenings on patients.

www.epa.gov/pesticide-worker-safety/recognition-and-management-pesticide-poisonings

Need Extra Assistance?

Contact community health workers (CHWs) or *promotores de salud* to enhance communication between you and your patient and get support to advocate for your patient's protection. To locate a CHW in your area, reach out to any of these organizations:

Visión y Compromiso | 213-613-0630

Comite Civico del Valle | 760-351-8761



Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
California Environmental Protection Agency

 510-622-3170

 pesticides@oehha.ca.gov

 www.oehha.ca.gov/pesticides



Raise Awareness to Limit Exposure to Pesticides

Share these tips with your patient to limit their exposure to pesticides during and after work.

At Work

- Carefully read and follow instructions on pesticide labels before usage.
- Mix, load, or apply restricted use pesticides only if you are a certified handler or under the direct supervision of a certified handler.
- Do not enter treated areas during the restricted entry interval.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment that fits.
- Wash your hands before eating, drinking, using the bathroom, or your phone.

After Work

- Remove work clothes and shoes before entering the house and immediately take a shower upon return.
- Wash work clothes separate from family laundry and leave work shoes outside.

Learn More

California Department of Pesticide Regulation's Pesticide Safety Information Series provide guidelines for field workers and pesticide handlers.
www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/whs/psisenglish.htm



Diagnose & Treat Pesticide Illness

Since there are no diagnostic tests for most pesticide poisonings and signs and symptoms vary, an accurate history of the patient's pesticide exposure is most important for diagnosis.

Example questions to assess your **patient's exposure history** include the following:

- Were you exposed to pesticides? If so, when and for how long?
- Are you experiencing any symptoms? If so, when did these develop?
- Are your symptoms worse at work? Do they improve when off work?
- Are any co-workers or individuals living with you experiencing the same or similar symptoms?

While there is often no specific therapy for most pesticide illnesses, you can prescribe treatments that can reduce or even reverse harmful effects.

Learn More

OEHHA offers a free CME accredited [online course](#) for physicians on the recognition, management, and reporting of pesticide illnesses.
medpested.oehha.ca.gov/signin/



Report Pesticide Illness

By California law, physicians and other healthcare providers must report known or suspected pesticide-related illness or injury **within 24 hours to the Local Health Officer**. Collect as much information as possible on your patient's exposure.

Learn More

OEHHA's webpage has information on how to report pesticide illness, including what, when, and whom to report.
www.oehha.ca.gov/pesticides/pesticide-illness-surveillance-pesticide-illness-reporting



Inform Your Patient About Their Rights

California worker safety laws apply to all agricultural workers, regardless of immigration status. As a physician, you can provide them with resources about their rights to:

1. **Obtain information** about pesticide usage, training records, and exposure, in a language the worker understands. As a physician, you also have the right to obtain information about your patient's exposure from their employer.
2. **Receive worker's compensation** for medical bills, and possibly even lost pay, following sickness or injury. As a physician, you must file a Doctor's First Report of Occupational Injury or Illness Form (DFR) within 5 days of the first visit.
3. **Report unsafe work conditions** to the California Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) or pesticide use violations to the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR).

You can reassure your patients that they will be protected from retaliation by their employers when exercising these rights.

Learn More

DIR has information about how to file a worker's compensation [claim](#) and [report](#) unsafe work conditions.

www.dir.ca.gov/dwc/fileclaim.htm and www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/complaint.htm

DPR provides guidelines about how to report pesticide use [violations](#).

www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/dept/quicklinks/report.htm

