



What to do if someone is exposed to pesticides

A guide for community health workers and other patient advocates

What to do immediately after being exposed to a pesticide



If swallowed, the person should get medical help. They should not try to make themselves vomit. If vomiting occurs, they should let their doctor know.



If it gets into the eyes, the eyes should be flushed slowly and gently with water for at least 15 minutes.



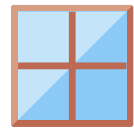
If it is inhaled, they should move to where there is fresh air. If the person is outside, they need to leave the area where pesticides can be smelled.



If it is on their skin, they should wash the skin with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.



If pesticides get on their clothes or shoes, they should remove them as soon as possible. They should leave shoes outside of the house and keep clothes in a sealed plastic bag to bring them to the doctor. Otherwise, they should wash clothes separately from other laundry.



If they are at home and suspect pesticides are being applied outside, they should close their windows, and turn off the air conditioning or heating system. If possible, they should stay inside or avoid the area for about 30 minutes after spraying.



If pesticides are applied inside the home, windows should be opened to allow air flow. People should avoid touching sprayed areas and leave the room until the pesticide has dried.

When to seek medical attention

If someone ingested a pesticide, is seriously ill, or unconscious, someone should immediately call 911 to get them help. They should let emergency responders and the other health professionals know that the person was exposed to a pesticide.

If they need first-aid information or advice on what to do after a pesticide exposure, they should call the California Poison Control System at: 1-800-222-1222. Help is available in English and Spanish.

Even if the person thinks their symptoms are mild, they should seek medical attention because symptoms can change quickly. They should not wait for symptoms to worsen!



What pesticide poisoning can feel like

Symptoms due to acute pesticide poisoning can go from mild to severe, affect all parts of the body, and can feel similar to the symptoms of other illnesses like the flu, heat-related illness, or even a hangover. Any of the following symptoms may be experienced:



Rash, heavy sweating, skin irritation



Red eyes, watery eyes, eye irritation



Chest pain



Shortness of breath, cough with phlegm



Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain



Tiredness, weakness, headaches, muscle twitches, dizziness, confusion, seizure, loss of consciousness

What to expect at the doctor's visit

The doctor will ask for information to help with the diagnosis. For example:

- The name of the pesticide or brand name; if they have access to the pesticide container, they can bring it to the doctor or take a picture of the label
- All their symptoms and how long after exposure they began
- If other people around them were exposed to the pesticide
- If other people at home or at work have similar symptoms

During the visit, the doctor may also: Do a physical exam

- Order lab testing of:
 - blood, urine, saliva, skin, or hair
 - shoes and clothes worn when they got exposed
- Recommend a treatment depending on the pesticide involved

How pesticides can affect our health in the long run

Small amounts of pesticides over a long period of time may harm our health. Even one-time exposures to a very toxic pesticide may affect our health in the long run. These health effects may take months or even years to develop.

These effects may include:

- Cancer
- respiratory problems
- damage to the nervous system

Exposure during pregnancy can lead to several health effects, including:

- Miscarriages
- Preterm birth or low birth weight birth defects
- Neurodevelopmental problems such as hyperactivity, attention deficit, and learning disabilities

If someone is exposed to pesticides at work or at home on a regular basis, they should tell their doctor even if they have never suffered from pesticide poisoning. Since some of the health effects caused by pesticides may take years to develop, having this information in their medical record can help the doctor in the future.

Who is more vulnerable to pesticides?

Infants, young children, pregnant women, elderly, and people with pre-existing conditions can be more affected by pesticides. They should be protected from pesticide exposure as much as possible.



For additional information about trainings and educational resources, contact us at:



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