

Pesticide Emergencies

At a Glance

- **If you or anyone else is seriously ill, call 911 for help.** In less serious cases, call your doctor or the Poison Control Center, 1-800-222-1222.
- Be sure to tell emergency responders or your doctor that you may have been exposed to a pesticide.
- If you or anyone else is being exposed to pesticide drift, move away from any area where you can smell pesticides.
- To report possible pesticide misuse, call your County Agricultural Commissioner's office. You can get the number and be connected by calling toll-free, 1-877PestLine (1-877-378-5463).

What you should do in an emergency depends on the type of pesticide incident and how serious it is. Taking the right action is as important as taking action right away.

If you or anyone else is seriously ill, call 911 for help.

If you feel ill and want to see the doctor or go to the hospital, have someone else drive.

If someone swallowed a pesticide, call for help right away. Do not wait for symptoms to appear and **DO NOT MAKE THE PERSON VOMIT.** Call **911** or take the person to the nearest emergency medical clinic or hospital.

If the person is unconscious, immediately remove the victim from the source of the exposure, if you can do so without putting yourself or the victim in further danger. Call **911** for emergency help. If possible, have someone

What are the typical symptoms of pesticide illness?

A pesticide can make you sick if you swallow it, breathe it, or get it on your skin or in your eyes. Your symptoms could be delayed as long as a day. Depending on the pesticide and the amount you were exposed to, you may experience:

- Flu-like symptoms including tiredness, headache, or dizziness.
- Blurred vision.
- Stuffy nose, sore throat or coughing.
- Eye, nose or skin irritation.
- Excessive sweating.
- Vomiting, diarrhea, or stomach cramps.
- Nervousness, confusion, loss of coordination.

In more serious cases, you may:

- Be weak or unable to walk.
- Feel discomfort in your chest.
- Have pinpoint pupils.
- Foam at the mouth and nose.
- Have problems breathing.
- Lose consciousness or even go into a coma.

Your regional Poison Control Center *can give you information and advice on whether your symptoms may be related to pesticide exposure. Call 1-800-222-1222. (Interpreters are available in more than 100 languages.) At no charge, the Poison Control Center will give you first-aid information and advise you on what to do next. Have as much information as possible about what happened and, if you know, the pesticide involved.*

else call while you give first aid. **DO NOT GIVE FLUIDS TO AN UNCONSCIOUS OR SEMI-ALERT PERSON.** If the victim is unconscious, do not perform mouth-to-mouth rescue breathing as you may become contaminated yourself. Warn emergency responders that the person may be contaminated with pesticides.

If the pesticide is on a person's skin, remove their clothing and thoroughly wash their skin with soap and water. Be careful not to contaminate yourself. Dry the person and wrap in a blanket. Put all contaminated clothing in a paper bag and seal it. If you believe the incident was the result of an illegal application, do not wash the clothing. Save it as evidence to give to investigators. If you wash the clothing, keep it separate from other laundry.

If the pesticide got into the eyes, immediately flush with cool water (not too cold or too hot.) Keep the eye open and as wide as possible while flushing for at least 15 minutes. If the person is wearing contact lenses and the lenses did not flush out from the running water, have the person try to remove the contacts **AFTER** the flushing procedure. (If both eyes are affected, or if the chemicals are also on other parts of the body, have the victim take a shower.) Continue to flush the eye with clean water while seeking urgent medical attention.

If the pesticide was inhaled, remove the person to fresh air if you can do that without danger to yourself. Loosen all tight clothing and keep the victim as quiet as possible while you call for medical assistance.

If the problem is related to home-use pesticides, have the pesticide container with you when you go to a doctor or call Poison Control. Put it in a plastic bag to protect you and others from exposure. The information on the label helps with diagnosis and treatment. Take care in handling pesticide containers to avoid contaminating yourself or anyone else.

Be sure to tell the doctor you may have been exposed to a pesticide and that your symptoms may be related to that exposure. Because many pesticide symptoms are similar

to symptoms of flu or other common illnesses, making a diagnosis is sometimes difficult. Doctors have access to pesticide experts at the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) by calling 916-445-4222 during business hours. They can also click on “Information for Physicians” on DPR’s Web site, www.cdpr.ca.gov, to get links to medical information on pesticides.

Remind the doctor that the law **requires any suspected pesticide illness to be reported to the county health officer within 24 hours**. Information on these requirements and the reporting form are on DPR’s Web site, www.cdpr.ca.gov. Click on the “Information for Physicians” link.

What should I do if I think there has been pesticide drift through the air?

Move away from any area where you can smell pesticides.

If people are getting sick, call 911 to get emergency medical help. Call the County Agricultural Commissioner’s office to report what is happening. You can find the phone number on the inside back cover of this booklet, in the government white pages of your local phone book, or by calling DPR’s toll-free complaint information line, 1-87PestLine (1-877-378-5463). In a non-emergency situation after hours or on weekends, call the non-emergency number for your local police or sheriff’s office. (You can find the number in the government pages of your local phone directory.) They will know how to contact the proper authorities.

Drift can be in the form of a spray or a gas in the air. If a liquid spray drifts onto skin, wash with soap and running water for at least 15 minutes. Call the doctor or the Poison Control Center, 1-800-222-1222, for advice on what to do next.

If you are indoors and you smell a pesticide being applied outside or if you think that a pesticide gas is drifting into your neighborhood, stay inside and close all windows, doors, and any other openings. Turn off swamp coolers, air conditioners, and other fans that bring in outside air.

If you are outdoors, move to where you can’t smell the pesticide. You may need to move some distance away.



Bring the pesticide container with you when you go to the doctor. The information on the label will help with diagnosis and treatment.

Fumigants are gaseous pesticides. They are released into buildings (like termite-infested homes) or into stored grain or other food. They can also be injected into the soil and covered with a plastic tarp, applied as a liquid on top of soil and then covered with water, or applied by drip irrigation. Fumigants, being a gas, can drift into neighborhoods near treated fields or buildings. Many (but not all) fumigants have a strong smell or have odor added to them. Some can cause eye irritation before you can smell them.

Do not touch any spray residue on a vehicle, building surface, or other object, and don't wash it off. Call the County Agricultural Commissioner's office. They may want to take samples for their investigation. You can find the phone number on the inside back cover of this booklet, or by calling toll-free 1-877-378-5463 (1-87PestLine).

You can find more information on pesticide drift beginning on page 13.

What should I do if there is a pesticide spill?

Call 911 if you see an accident involving a vehicle carrying pesticides or a large pesticide spill into a river or onto a road.

Even small pesticide spills can threaten the safety of people, wildlife, and the environment. The danger depends on the pesticide and how much is spilled. With major pesticide spills, it is better to let emergency responders contain and clean up the spill. They have the training and equipment to safely handle such emergencies.

You can clean up a small spill of household pesticides yourself. Do it right away. You don't want a child or pet harmed by spilled pesticide. **Don't hose down the spill.** Runoff can damage plants or pollute rivers and streams. Instead, sprinkle the spill with sawdust or cat litter and sweep it into a paper bag. You can call your County Agricultural Commissioner or county office of environmental health to ask how to dispose of the bag. The product label may also include disposal information. Many communities have hazardous waste collection facilities for this purpose. Go to www.earth911.com to find the one closest to you.

If you spill pesticide on yourself, wash it off immediately with soap and water or as the product label tells you. Remove contaminated clothing and call the **Poison Control Center, 1-800-222-1222**, for more advice on what to do.