

## **Sodium Hydroxide Patient Information Sheet**

This handout provides information and follow-up instructions for persons who have been exposed to sodium hydroxide.

### **What is sodium hydroxide?**

Sodium hydroxide is a white, solid material that picks up moisture from the air. If put in water, it produces a large amount of heat. Both the solid and its solutions are very corrosive and can cause severe burns. Sodium hydroxide is a member of a group of chemical compounds also known as bases or alkalies, which can neutralize and are neutralized by, acids, releasing a lot of heat.

### **What immediate health effects can be caused by exposure to sodium hydroxide?**

Solid sodium hydroxide or strong solutions produce immediate pain when they come in contact with any part of the body. Weak solutions may not produce pain for several hours, but serious burns can result even from weak solutions if they are not washed off quickly. Spilling sodium hydroxide over large areas of the skin or swallowing sodium hydroxide may cause shock and even death. Sodium hydroxide can break down proteins and generates heat when dissolving in water. Contact with sensitive tissues, such as the eyes, is particularly dangerous and can cause permanent damage or even blindness.

### **Can sodium hydroxide exposure be treated?**

There is no antidote for sodium hydroxide, but the burns and shock it can cause can be treated. Patients who develop serious symptoms need to be hospitalized.

### **Are any future health effects likely to occur?**

A single small exposure from which a person recovers quickly is not likely to cause delayed or long-term effects. After a serious exposure to large areas of the skin, scarring may occur that will require skin grafts. A serious eye exposure can result in blindness. If sodium hydroxide mist was breathed, permanent injury to the lungs may result. If a solution was swallowed, damage to the mouth, throat, and esophagus may cause permanent scarring, making swallowing difficult.

### **What tests can be done if a person has been exposed to sodium hydroxide?**

Specific tests for the presence of sodium hydroxide in blood or urine are not available. If a severe exposure has occurred, blood and urine analyses and other tests may show whether the lungs, eyes, or stomach has been injured. Testing is not needed in every case.

### **Where can more information about sodium hydroxide be found?**

More information about sodium hydroxide can be obtained from your regional poison control center; your state, county, or local health department; the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR); your doctor; or a clinic in your area that specializes in occupational and environmental health. If the exposure happened at work, you may wish to discuss it with your employer, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), or the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Ask the person who gave you this form for help in locating these telephone numbers.

### Follow-up Instructions

Keep this page and take it with you to your next appointment. Follow *only* the instructions checked below.

- Call your doctor or the Emergency Department if you develop any unusual signs or symptoms within the next 24 hours, especially:
  - drooling or difficulty swallowing
  - stomach pain or vomiting
  - coughing, wheezing, or hoarseness
  - difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, or chest pain
  - increased pain or a discharge from exposed eyes
  - increased redness or pain or a pus-like discharge in the area of a skin burn

- No follow-up appointment is necessary unless you develop any of the symptoms listed above.
- Call for an appointment with Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ in the practice of \_\_\_\_\_.  
When you call for your appointment, please say that you were treated in the Emergency Department at \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital by \_\_\_\_\_ and were advised to be seen again in \_\_\_\_\_ days.

- Return to the Emergency Department/ \_\_\_\_\_ Clinic on (date) \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM for a follow-up examination.

- Do not perform vigorous physical activities for 1 to 2 days.
- You may resume everyday activities including driving and operating machinery.
- Do not return to work for \_\_\_\_\_ days.
- You may return to work on a limited basis. See instructions below.
- Avoid exposure to cigarette smoke for 72 hours; smoke may worsen the condition of your lungs.
- Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages for at least 24 hours; alcohol may worsen injury to your stomach or have other effects.
- Avoid taking the following medications: \_\_\_\_\_
- You may continue taking the following medication(s) that your doctor(s) prescribed for you: \_\_\_\_\_

- Other instructions: \_\_\_\_\_

- Provide the Emergency Department with the name and the number of your primary care physician so that the ED can send him or her a record of your emergency department visit.
- You or your physician can get more information on the chemical by contacting: \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_, or by checking out the following Internet Web sites: \_\_\_\_\_; \_\_\_\_\_.

Signature of patient \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of physician \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_