

This fact sheet answers the most frequently asked health questions (FAQs) about chlordane. For more information, call the ATSDR Information Center at 1-888-422-8737. This fact sheet is one in a series of summaries about hazardous substances and their health effects. This information is important because this substance may harm you. The effects of exposure to any hazardous substance depend on the dose, the duration, how you are exposed, personal traits and habits, and whether other chemicals are present.

**SUMMARY: Exposure to chlordane occurs mostly from eating contaminated foods, such as root crops, meats, fish, and shellfish, or from touching contaminated soil. High levels of chlordane can cause damage to the nervous system or liver. This chemical has been found in at least 171 of 1,416 National Priorities List sites identified by the Environmental Protection Agency.**

## What is chlordane?

(Pronounced klôr/dân')

Chlordane is a manufactured chemical that was used as a pesticide in the United States from 1948 to 1988. Technical chlordane is not a single chemical, but is actually a mixture of pure chlordane mixed with many related chemicals. It doesn't occur naturally in the environment. It is a thick liquid whose color ranges from colorless to amber. Chlordane has a mild, irritating smell.

Some of its trade names are Octachlor and Velsicol 1068. Until 1983, chlordane was used as a pesticide on crops like corn and citrus and on home lawns and gardens.

Because of concern about damage to the environment and harm to human health, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) banned all uses of chlordane in 1983 except to control termites. In 1988, EPA banned all uses.

## What happens to chlordane when it enters the environment?

- Chlordane entered the environment when it was used as a pesticide on crops, on lawns and gardens, and to control termites.
- Chlordane sticks strongly to soil particles at the surface and is not likely to enter groundwater.

- It can stay in the soil for over 20 years.
- Most chlordane leaves soil by evaporation to the air.
- It breaks down very slowly.
- Chlordane doesn't dissolve easily in water.
- It builds up in the tissues of fish, birds, and mammals.

## How might I be exposed to chlordane?

- By eating crops grown in soil that contains chlordane.
- By eating fish or shellfish caught in water that is contaminated by chlordane.
- By breathing air or touching soil near homes treated for termites with chlordane.
- By breathing air or by touching soil near waste sites or landfills.

## How can chlordane affect my health?

Chlordane affects the nervous system, the digestive system, and the liver in people and animals. Headaches, irritability, confusion, weakness, vision problems, vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhea, and jaundice have occurred in people who breathed air containing high concentrations of chlordane or accidentally swallowed small amounts of chlordane. Large amounts of chlordane taken by mouth can cause convulsions and death in people.

ToxFAQs Internet address via WWW is <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaq.html>

A man who had long-term skin contact with soil containing high levels of chlordane had convulsions. Japanese workers who used chlordane over a long period of time had minor changes in liver function.

Animals given high levels of chlordane by mouth for short periods died or had convulsions. Long-term exposure caused harmful effects in the liver of test animals.

We do not know whether chlordane affects the ability of people to have children or whether it causes birth defects. Animals exposed before birth or while nursing developed behavioral effects later.

### **How likely is chlordane to cause cancer?**

The International Agency for Research on Cancer has determined that chlordane is not classifiable as to its carcinogenicity to humans. Studies of workers who made or used chlordane do not show that exposure to chlordane is related to cancer, but the information is not sufficient to know for sure. Mice fed low levels of chlordane in food developed liver cancer.

### **Is there a medical test to show whether I've been exposed to chlordane?**

Laboratory tests can measure chlordane and its breakdown products in blood, fat, urine, feces, and breast milk. The amount of breakdown products measured in body fat or breast milk does not tell how much or how long ago you were exposed to chlordane or if harmful effects will occur.

### **Has the federal government made recommendations to protect human health?**

In 1988, the EPA banned all uses of chlordane. The EPA recommends that a child should not drink water with more

than 60 parts of chlordane per billion parts of drinking water (60 ppb) for longer than 1 day. EPA has set a limit in drinking water of 2 ppb.

EPA requires spills or releases of chlordane into the environment of 1 pound or more to be reported to EPA.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) limits the amount of chlordane and its breakdown products in most fruits and vegetables to less than 300 ppb and in animal fat and fish to less than 100 ppb.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH), and the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH) set a maximum level of 0.5 milligrams of chlordane per cubic meter (mg/m<sup>3</sup>) in workplace air for an 8-hour workday, 40-hour workweek. These agencies have advised that eye and skin contact should be avoided because this may be a significant route of exposure.

### **Glossary**

Carcinogenicity: Ability to cause cancer.

Long-term: Lasting one year or longer.

Milligram (mg): One thousandth of a gram.

Pesticide: A substance that kills pests.

ppb: Parts per billion.

### **References**

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). 1994. Toxicological profile for chlordane (update). Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service.

**Where can I get more information?** For more information, contact the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Division of Toxicology, 1600 Clifton Road NE, Mailstop F-32, Atlanta, GA 30333. Phone: 1-888-422-8737, FAX: 770-488-4178. ToxFAQs Internet address via WWW is <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaq.html> ATSDR can tell you where to find occupational and environmental health clinics. Their specialists can recognize, evaluate, and treat illnesses resulting from exposure to hazardous substances. You can also contact your community or state health or environmental quality department if you have any more questions or concerns.

