

Methylene Chloride Patient Information Sheet

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

What is methylene chloride?

Methylene chloride is a colorless, volatile liquid with a sweet smell. It is used in plastics processing, as a paint and varnish remover, and as a cleaning liquid for electronic boards and metal parts.

What immediate health effects can be caused by exposure to methylene chloride?

Methylene chloride can affect the body if the vapor is inhaled, if the liquid touches the skin or eyes, or if it is swallowed. In the body, some methylene chloride is changed to carbon monoxide (a methylene chloride metabolite), which prevents the blood from carrying oxygen to the tissues. At moderate levels, methylene chloride can cause headaches, fatigue, difficulty walking, and dizziness. High levels can cause fainting and even death. Methylene chloride can irritate the lungs, causing a build-up of fluid in the lungs. It can also cause the heart to beat irregularly or to stop beating. Generally, the more serious the exposure, the more severe the symptoms. The fetus and neonates are particularly vulnerable to poisoning with carbon monoxide.

Can methylene chloride poisoning be treated?

If a person has inhaled or swallowed a large amount of methylene chloride, breathing 100% oxygen is helpful. These patients may need to be hospitalized. Most exposed patients get well.

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 or repeated exposures, damage to the brain can cause memory loss, poor coordination, and decreased ability to think. Long-term exposures over many years have been associated with cancer.

What tests can be done if a person has been exposed to methylene chloride?

Specific tests for the presence of methylene chloride in blood or urine generally are not useful to the doctor. If a severe exposure has occurred, blood and urine analyses and other tests may show whether the liver, brain, heart, or lungs have been injured. Testing is not needed in every case.

Where can more information about methylene chloride be found?

More information about methylene chloride 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:

- headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness
- chest pains, difficulty thinking, blurred vision
- dyspnea on exertion, weakness
- palpitations, tachycardia, tachypnea

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 _____