

Toluene

Patient Information Sheet

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

What is toluene?

Toluene is a clear, colorless liquid with a sweet odor. It is obtained from crude petroleum and is highly flammable. Toluene is used in a variety of industries and is a common solvent for products such as paints, thinners, and glues. It is found in small amounts in gasoline.

What immediate health effects can be caused by exposure to toluene?

Breathing toluene vapors in small amounts may cause a mild headache, dizziness, drowsiness, or nausea. With more serious exposure, toluene may cause sleepiness, stumbling, irregular heartbeat, fainting, or even death. Toluene vapor is mildly irritating to the skin, eyes, and lungs. If liquid toluene contacts the skin, it may cause irritation and a rash. Liquid toluene splashed in the eyes can damage the eyes. Generally, the more serious the exposure, the more severe the symptoms.

Can toluene poisoning be treated?

There is no antidote for toluene, but its effects can be treated, and most exposed persons get well. Persons who have experienced serious symptoms may 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 toluene, some symptoms may take a few days to develop.

Repeated sniffing of toluene can cause permanent damage to the brain, muscles, heart, and kidneys.

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

Specific tests for the presence of toluene in blood or urine generally are not useful to the doctor. Hippuric acid, a breakdown product of toluene, can be measured in urine if the toluene dose was high. If a severe exposure has occurred, blood and urine analyses and other tests may show whether the brain, heart, or kidneys have been injured. Testing is not needed in every case.

Where can more information about toluene be found?

More information about toluene can be obtained from your regional poison control center; the 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:
fatigue, headache, dizziness, tremor or seizures.
coughing, shortness of breath or wheezing
chest pain or tightness
increased pain or a discharge from injured eyes
increased redness or pain or a pus-like discharge in the area of a skin burn
fever

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 _____