

Tetrachloroethylene Patient Information Sheet

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

What is tetrachloroethylene?

Tetrachloroethylene is a colorless liquid with a sweet smell. It is used to make other chemicals, to degrease metal parts, to dry-clean fabric and in fabric processing. It is also used as a solvent in printing inks, paints, lacquers, varnishes, and adhesives. It is found in many products used in the average home, such as spot removers, adhesives, paint removers, water repellants, wood cleaners, and silicone sprays. Sometimes people intentionally inhale it to get “high”.

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

Breathing or swallowing tetrachloroethylene can cause lightheadedness, dizziness, clumsiness, nausea, and vomiting. Very large amounts can cause sleepiness, coma, and even death. It can damage the liver and kidneys. If the liquid spills on the skin or eyes, it can cause irritation or burns. Vapors in the air can cause burning eyes.

Can tetrachloroethylene poisoning be treated?

There is no antidote for tetrachloroethylene poisoning, but its effects can be treated and most exposed persons recover completely. People who have been exposed to large amounts of tetrachloroethylene might 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. An exposure that occurs over many years can affect the brain, skin, liver, and kidneys and can increase the risk of certain types of cancer.

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

Specific tests for the presence of tetrachloroethylene breakdown products in blood and urine are available, but they are not generally useful to your doctor. If a severe exposure has occurred, blood and other tests might show whether the heart, lungs, liver, or kidneys have been affected. Testing is not needed in every case.

Where can more information about tetrachloroethylene be found?

More information about tetrachloroethylene 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. Ask the person who gave you this form for help locating these telephone numbers. 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:

- dizziness or clumsiness
- nausea or vomiting
- loss of appetite
- difficulty breathing

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 _____