

## PHOSGENE FACT SHEET

### What is phosgene?

Phosgene is a chemical used to make plastics and pesticides. Phosgene can be found as a liquid or gas. If released as a liquid, it quickly turns into a gas that stays close to the ground and spreads fast. The phosgene gas may appear colorless or as a white to pale yellow cloud. The smell can range from a pleasant odor of newly mown hay to a strong and unpleasant odor depending on the concentration.

### How you can be exposed to phosgene?

The extent of exposure will depend on the route, amount, and the length of time you were exposed to phosgene. If phosgene comes into contact with water or food, you may be exposed through touching, drinking or eating the contaminated source. If phosgene gas is released into the air, people may be exposed through breathing air, skin or eye contact.

### What are the immediate symptoms of exposure phosgene?

During or immediately after exposure to dangerous concentrations of phosgene, the following signs and symptoms may develop:

- Coughing
- Burning sensation in the throat and eyes
- Watery eyes
- Blurred vision
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Nausea and vomiting
- Skin contact can result in lesions similar to those from frostbite or burns
- Following exposure to high concentrations of phosgene, a person may develop fluid in the lungs (pulmonary edema) within 2 to 6 hours.
- Exposure to phosgene may cause delayed effects that may not be apparent for up to 48 hours after exposure, even if the person feels better or appears well following removal from exposure. Therefore, people who have been exposed to phosgene should be monitored for 48 hours afterward.

Delayed effects that can appear for up to 48 hours include the following:

- Difficulty breathing
- Coughing up white to pink-tinged fluid (a sign of pulmonary edema)
- Low blood pressure
- Heart failure

**What are the long-term health effects of exposure to phosgene?**

Most people who recover after an exposure to phosgene make a complete recovery. However, chronic bronchitis and emphysema have been reported as a result of phosgene exposure. To date, phosgene has been identified as non-cancerous.

**What should I do if I think I have been exposed to phosgene?**

If you think you have been exposed, leave the area quickly and get to fresh air. Remove your clothing and quickly wash your entire body with soap and water. If your eyes are burning or your vision is blurred, rinse them with plain water for 10 to 15 minutes. If you wear contacts, remove them before rinsing your eyes. Place your contaminated clothes and contact lenses into a plastic bag and seal. Place the bag into a second plastic bag and seal. If you have swallowed the phosgene, do not induce vomiting or drink fluids. **Call 911 for medical attention right away and removal of the contaminated items. Do not drive yourself to the hospital as you may become very ill on your way.**

**Where can I get more information on phosgene?**

Regional Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222)

[www.bt.cdc.gov/](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/)

[www.dshs.state.tx.us](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us)

[www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/rtkweb/rtkhsfs.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/rtkweb/rtkhsfs.htm)

**Source of information:**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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