

RIOT CONTROL AGENTS FACT SHEET

What are riot control agents?

Riot control agents (or tear gas) are made of chemical compounds that can limit an individual's ability to function by irritating their eyes, mouth, throat, lungs and skin. Tear gas is used by law enforcement for crowd control and used by the military as a training aid to test speed and ability to put on a gas mask within a set time period.

How you can be exposed to riot control agents?

If released into the air, you can be exposed through breathing, skin or eye contact. Riot agents work by causing irritation to the area of contact, such as the eyes, skin, nose within seconds of exposure. The effects of exposure to a riot control agent are usually short-lived (15 - 30 minutes) after you have been moved from the source and decontaminated (cleaned off).

How soon does an exposed person show symptoms?

The amount and route of the exposure to tear gas will contribute to the time of onset of illness.

What are the immediate symptoms?

- Eyes: excessive tearing, burning, and blurred vision
- Nose: runny nose, burning and swelling
- Mouth: burning, irritation, hard to swallow, and drooling
- Lungs: tightness in chest, coughing, choking sensation, wheezing
- Skin: can exhibit burns and rash.
- If *inhaled*, you can experience a runny nose, swelling, chest tightness, coughing or shortness of breath. If *ingested*, you can have problems drooling, swallowing or can experience nausea and vomiting.

What are the long-term health effects?

If you are exposed for a long period of time, the severe effects may lead to eye problems, such as scarring, glaucoma, and cataracts or respiratory failure possibly resulting in death.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to riot control agents?

If the release was outdoors, move away from the area where the agents were released and get to fresh air. Go to the highest ground possible, because riot control agents will form a dense vapor cloud that can travel close to the ground. If the release was indoors, get out of the building. If you are near a release of riot control agents, you may be asked to either evacuate the area or "*shelter in place*" inside a building to avoid being exposed to the chemical.

If you think you may have been exposed to riot control agents, you should remove your clothes quickly and wash your entire body with soap and water. If your eyes are burning or vision is blurred, rinse your eyes with plain water for 10 to 15 minutes. If you wear contact lenses, remove them and place them with the contaminated clothing inside a plastic bag and seal. Place the bag into a second plastic bag and seal. **Call 911 for medical attention 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 riot control agents?

www.bt.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/rtkweb/rtkhsfs.htm

Source of information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)