

STRYCHNINE FACT SHEET

What is strychnine?

Strychnine is a white, odorless, bitter crystalline powder that can be taken by mouth, inhaled or mixed in a solution and injected directly into the veins. It is considered a strong poison and only a small amount can cause serious health effects, including death. Today, the chemical is primarily used as a pesticide, to kill rats but can also be found in street drugs.

How can you be exposed to strychnine?

You can be exposed to strychnine through breathing air, drinking water and eating food that has been contaminated with strychnine.

What are the immediate symptoms?

If you are exposed to strychnine, symptoms will occur within 15 to 60 minutes. This chemical affects your nerve signals to the muscles. This is known as the “off switch” for muscles. When the nerve signals are not working correctly, muscles throughout the body have severe and painful spasms.

If you are exposed to low or moderate doses of strychnine, you may exhibit the symptoms of anxiety, restlessness, painful muscles, fever, weak arms and legs, jaw tightness, inability to breathe and dark urine, ability to become startled easily, and uncontrollable arching of the back and neck.

If you are exposed to high amounts of strychnine, you may exhibit symptoms within the first 15 to 30 minutes of the inability to breathe can lead to death.

What are the long-term health effects?

The long-term effects may result from damage caused by the poisoning such as, brain damage from low oxygen, kidney failure. People severely affected by strychnine poisoning are not likely to survive.

What should you do if you think you have been exposed to strychnine?

If you think you have been exposed to strychnine through ingestion, call your doctor at once and he or she will check your symptoms and provide treatment, if necessary.

If you think you have been exposed to the chemical by inhaling it, move quickly to an area where fresh air is available. Remove your clothing by cutting them off the body; if possible do not pull the clothes over your head. Quickly wash your entire body with

large amounts of 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, wash your hands after removing contaminated clothes and then remove the contacts before rinsing your eyes.

If you wear eye glasses, remove and wash them with soap and water. You can put your eyeglasses back on after you wash them. Place your contaminated clothes and contact lenses into a plastic bag and seal. Place the bag into a second plastic bag and seal. If tabun has been ingested, do not drink fluids or induce vomiting. **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 you can get more information on strychnine?

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)

Rev. July 2008