

## WHITE PHOSPHORUS FACT SHEET

### What is white phosphorus?

White phosphorus is a colorless, white, or yellow waxy solid with a garlic-like smell. It is used by the military in various types of ammunition, to produce smoke concealing troop movements and identifying targets. It is also used in fertilizers, food additives, and cleaning compounds.

### How you can be exposed to white phosphorus?

You can be exposed to white phosphorus by working in an industry that uses it. You can also be exposed by breathing contaminated air, drinking or swimming in contaminated water, eating contaminated food, or touching contaminated soil.

### How soon does an exposed person show symptoms?

The health effects caused by white phosphorus depend on the amount, the route of exposure and the length of time that people are exposed. Typically symptoms will appear within a few hours after being exposed.

### What are the immediate symptoms?

If you inhale, ingest or absorb white phosphorus, you may have symptoms of:

- coughing and irritation of the throat and lungs
- vomiting or stomach cramps
- extremely drowsy
- drowsiness
- skin burns
- liver, heart, or kidney damage that could lead to death.

### What are the long-term health effects?

Breathing white phosphorus for long periods may cause a condition known as "phossy jaw" which involves poor wound healing of the mouth and breakdown of the jaw bone. It is not known what type of health effects may result if you are exposed to small amounts over a long period of time.

### What should you do if you think you have been exposed to white phosphorus?

If you think that you have been exposed to white phosphorus, contact your doctor for medical attention. There is no medical test that shows if you have been exposed to white phosphorus. However, the symptoms listed above may lead your doctor to suspect that you have been exposed if you have a history of exposure. **If you are extremely sick, please call 911 for medical attention right away. Do not drive yourself to the hospital as you may become very ill on your way.**

**Where can you get more information on white phosphorus?**

[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)