

ARSENIC FACT SHEET

What is Arsenic?

It is found naturally in the environment. This substance is white or a colorless powder that does not evaporate. It has no smell and no special taste. Therefore, you cannot tell if arsenic is present in your food, water or air.

How can you be exposed to arsenic?

You may be exposed to arsenic by eating food, drinking water or breathing air that has been contaminated with it. You can be exposed if your job involves making or use of arsenic. Kids may be exposed when they play in dirt and put their hands in their mouths. If you live in an area with high natural levels of arsenic, this can lead to abnormal elevated levels of arsenic in soil or water. You may also be exposed if you live near a harmful waste site or a formerly agricultural area where arsenic was used on crops.

What are the immediate symptoms of exposure to arsenic?

Breathing high levels of inorganic arsenic can give you a sore throat or irritated lungs. Ingesting very high levels of arsenic can result in death. Exposure to lower levels can cause nausea and vomiting, decreased production of red and white blood cells, abnormal heart rhythm, damage to blood vessels, and a sensation of "pins and needles" in hands and feet.

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

Ingesting or breathing low levels of inorganic arsenic for a long time can cause a darkening of the skin and the appearance of small "corns" or "warts" on the palms, soles, and torso. Inhalation of inorganic arsenic can cause increase risk of lung cancer. Arsenic exposure may cause nerve damage leading to nervous system disorders. There is also some evidence that suggests that long-term exposure to arsenic in children may result in lower IQ scores. Swallowing arsenic has also been reported to increase the risk of cancer in the liver, bladder, kidneys, prostate, and lungs.

What should I do to reduce the risk of exposure to arsenic?

Wear personal protection gear such as a dust mask, gloves, and protective clothing when working with arsenic-treated wood in home projects. Use cleaner sources of water and limit contact with soil, if you live in an area with a high level of arsenic in the water or soil. Pay close attention to dust and dirt control in the home (i.e., air filters, frequent cleaning or etc.). Discourage your kids from putting objects in their mouths and make sure they wash their hands often, mainly before eating. Always keep pesticides and household chemical containing arsenic out of reach of young kids to prevent accidental poisoning.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to arsenic?

It is very difficult to determine if you have been exposed to arsenic, since it has no odor or taste. If you think that you have been exposed and you are having the symptoms listed above, **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 I get more information on arsenic?

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)