

CYANIDE FACT SHEET

What is cyanide?

Cyanide is a chemical that can be deadly. It comes in the form of a colorless gas or crystal. Cyanide may have “a bitter almond” smell, but it does not always give off an odor, and not everyone can detect this odor.

How you can be exposed to cyanide?

Cyanide can enter the water, soil or air as a result of both nature and industrial activities. It is found in cigarette smoke and other combustion products such as plastics. You can be exposed by breathing air, drinking water, eating food, or touching that has been contaminated with cyanide.

What are the immediate symptoms of exposure to cyanide?

People exposed to a small amount of cyanide by breathing it, absorbing it through their skin, or eating foods that contain it may have some or all of the following symptoms within minutes:

- Rapid breathing
- Restlessness
- Dizziness
- Weakness
- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Rapid heart rate / heart pains
- Enlarged thyroid gland

Exposure to a large amount of cyanide by any route may cause these other health effects as well:

- Convulsions
- Low blood pressure
- Slow heart rate
- Loss of consciousness
- Lung injury
- Respiratory failure leading to death
- coma

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

Survivors of serious cyanide poisoning may develop heart and brain damage.

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

The main route of exposure to cyanide is through inhalation. If you are near a release of cyanide gas, the local authorities may tell you to either evacuate the area or to stay where you are inside a building to avoid being exposed to the chemical. If you think that you have been exposed to cyanide, leave the area and get to fresh air. If your body is exposed, remove your clothing and quickly 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 plastic bag inside another bag and seal.

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 cyanide?

Regional poison control center (1-800-222-1222)

www.bt.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

Source of Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)