



COLORADO ENVIRONMENTAL PESTICIDE EDUCATION PROGRAM

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PESTICIDE EXPOSURE AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

L.G. Skoglund
S.K. McDonald

This fact sheet defines pesticide exposure and explains first aid for pesticide poisonings.

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Pesticide Exposure and Emergency Response

Pesticides are an important tool in protecting our food, fiber, lawns, and homes from insects, diseases, weeds, and rodents. When properly used they can be extremely beneficial, yet if misused they can be very dangerous.

Most poisoning cases involving pesticides come from mishandling or improper storage. Most pesticide poisoning deaths result from exposure or inhalations. Pesticide accidents can be reduced drastically by following a few basic rules:

ALWAYS READ THE LABEL before purchasing, mixing, or applying a pesticide, as well as with storage or disposal of a pesticide. The label will have **signal words** to alert you to the level of danger:

- **DANGER-POISON** indicates high toxicity, and is printed in red, with a skull and crossbones
- **WARNING** indicates moderate toxicity
- **CAUTION** indicates low toxicity.
- No signal words indicate non-toxicity



Stay away from areas which have just been treated. Wait until the spray has dried, or the dust has settled unless a longer restricted reentry interval (REI) is specified (See the label).

Be aware of the early symptoms caused by pesticide poisonings. There are two kinds of poisonings – acute and chronic. **Acute** poisoning is severe and occurs after a single exposure to the chemical. Symptoms are usually dramatic and sudden. **Chronic** poisoning occurs after repeated exposures to the chemical. Symptoms may include nervousness, slowed reflexes, irritability, or general decline of health.

General symptoms of acute pesticide poisoning:

Mild

- Fatigue, headache, dizziness, blurred vision, or skin irritation
- Excessive sweating, vomiting, or stomach cramps

Moderate

- Inability to walk or weakness
- Chest discomfort or pinpoint pupils

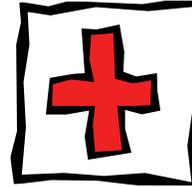
Severe

- Unconsciousness, pinpoint pupils, or foaming from the mouth and nose
- Strained breathing, coma, or death

First Aid for Poisonings:

Knowing what to do can prevent an accident from becoming severe. A great deal of information is supplied on the label of the pesticide container, so keep it handy at all times and read it for immediate treatment instructions.

- Stay calm
- If a pesticide gets on your clothing or skin, remove clothing and wash skin thoroughly
- If pesticides get into the eyes, flush the eyes with water for 15 minutes, being careful to keep pesticide out of other eye. Do not use eye drops
- When the poisons are inhaled, take the person to fresh air. If the person is not breathing give artificial respiration
- If a pesticide is ingested, drink water to dilute the chemical, as directed on the label. Never vomit unless the label or your physician recommends it
- Call the [Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Center](#) at 1-800-222-1222 and be prepared with the name of the active ingredient and the EPA registration number found on the label



The potential for a chemical to cause injury depends on several factors:

- Toxicity level of the chemical
- Dose or the quantity ingested or amount of exposure
- Route of absorption, or way the chemical comes in contact with the body
- Length of time exposed
- Physical and chemical properties of the chemical

Always follow label instructions and wear protective clothing when recommended.

References and Resources

Poli, B. and Fluker, S. 1985. *Homeowners' Guide to Pesticide Safety*, Circular 642. Florida Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

What to do in a Pesticide Emergency. June 1997. California Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Pesticide Regulation, Sacramento, CA.

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