

Phenol

Patient Information Sheet

This handout provides information and follow-up instructions for persons who have been exposed to phenol.

What is phenol?

Phenol may be found as a translucent, clear, or light-pink crystalline mass; a white powder, or a clear liquid. It has a sweet, sharp odor. Phenol is used in many commercially available products including plastics, resins, fertilizers, paints, photographic developers, and some medicines.

What immediate health effects can result from exposure to phenol?

Poisoning can occur when phenol gets on the skin or in the eyes, when it is inhaled, or when it is swallowed. Skin and eyes can be mildly or severely burned, depending on how much and how long the phenol was in contact with them. Breathing phenol vapors can burn the lining of the nose, throat, and lungs, just as it burns the skin. Severe injury to the lungs can cause them to fill with fluid, making breathing difficult. Swallowing phenol burns the lining of the digestive tract and can result in internal bleeding. Generally, the more serious the exposure, the more severe the symptoms. Phenol is absorbed easily into the body through the skin, lungs, and stomach. The brain is very sensitive to phenol. Phenol can cause seizures and coma and may interfere with the brain's control of regular breathing patterns. It can cause dangerous rhythm changes in the heart.

Can phenol poisoning be treated?

There is no antidote for phenol, but its effects can be treated, and most exposed persons do get well. Persons who have had a serious exposure may need to be hospitalized. If phenol got in your eyes, the doctor may put a special dye in your eyes and examine them with a magnifying device. If you swallowed phenol, you may have been given a solution containing charcoal, which will soak up phenol in your stomach.

Are any future health effects likely to occur?

A single small exposure from which a person recovers quickly is not likely to cause delayed or long-term effects. After a severe exposure, you may not notice any symptoms for up to 24 hours.

What tests can be done if a person has been exposed to phenol?

Depending on the severity of symptoms, the doctor may order blood tests, urine tests, chest x-ray, and a heart monitoring test. These tests may show whether damage has been done to the heart, kidneys, lungs, or nervous system. Abnormally high amounts of phenol may be found in the urine if exposure was severe. Testing is not needed in every case.

Where can more information about phenol be found?

More information about phenol can be obtained from your regional poison control center; your state, county, or local health department; the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR); your doctor; or a clinic in your area that specializes in occupational and environmental health. If the exposure happened at work, you may wish to discuss it with your employer, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), or the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Ask the person who gave you this form for help in locating these telephone numbers.

Follow-up Instructions

Keep this page and take it with you to your next appointment. Follow *only* the instructions checked below.

- Call your doctor or the Emergency Department if you develop any unusual signs or symptoms within the next 24 hours, especially:
 coughing or wheezing
 difficulty breathing, shortness of breath or chest pain
 irregular heartbeats, pounding or fluttering in your chest
 increased pain, swelling, redness, or a pus-like discharge where skin is burned
 unexplained drowsiness, dizziness, headache, or fainting
- No follow-up appointment is necessary unless you develop any of the symptoms listed above.
- Call for an appointment with Dr. _____ in the practice of _____.
 When you call for your appointment, please say that you were treated in the Emergency Department at _____ Hospital by _____ and were advised to be seen again in _____ days.
- Return to the Emergency Department/ _____ Clinic on (date) _____ at _____ AM/PM for a follow-up examination.
- Do not perform vigorous physical activities for 1 to 2 days.
- You may resume everyday activities including driving and operating machinery.
- Do not return to work for _____ days.
- You may return to work on a limited basis. See instructions below.
- Avoid exposure to cigarette smoke for 72 hours; smoke may worsen the condition of your lungs.
- Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages for at least 24 hours; alcohol may worsen injury to your stomach or have other effects.
- Avoid taking the following medications: _____
- You may continue taking the following medication(s) that your doctor(s) prescribed for you: _____

- Other instructions: _____

- Provide the Emergency Department with the name and the number of your primary care physician so that the ED can send him or her a record of your emergency department visit.
- You or your physician can get more information on the chemical by contacting: _____ or _____, or by checking out the following Internet Web sites: _____; _____.

Signature of patient _____ Date _____

Signature of physician _____ Date _____