
Vinyl Chloride (C₂H₃Cl) Patient Information Sheet

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

What is vinyl chloride?

Vinyl chloride is a colorless gas at room temperature that has a mild, sweet odor. It is handled and shipped as a liquid under high pressure in a special container. It is used to produce polyvinyl chloride (PVC), a plastic material used to make many products, including automotive parts, furniture, and building materials.

What immediate health effects can be caused by exposure to vinyl chloride?

Inhaling vinyl chloride causes sleepiness and dizziness, and can cause loss of consciousness. If pressurized liquid vinyl chloride escapes from its container and comes in contact with the skin or eyes, it can cause frostbite or irritation.

Can vinyl chloride poisoning be treated?

There is no antidote for vinyl chloride, but its effects can be treated and most exposed persons recover completely. Persons who have inhaled large amounts of vinyl chloride might need to be hospitalized.

Are any future health effects likely to occur?

A single small exposure from which a person recovers quickly is unlikely to cause delayed or long-term effects. Exposure to vinyl chloride over many years can affect the liver, nervous system, and skin. Long-term exposure can cause a rare form of liver cancer.

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

Specific tests for the presence of vinyl chloride in the breath or breakdown products in the urine are available, but they must be performed shortly after exposure and are not generally helpful. If a severe exposure has occurred, blood and other tests might show whether the liver or other organs have been damaged. Testing is not needed in every case.

Where can more information about vinyl chloride be found?

If the exposure happened at work, you might be required to contact your employer and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Employees may request a Health Hazard Evaluation from the national Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

You can get more information about vinyl chloride 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. Ask the person who gave you this form for help 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:

- dizziness, disorientation, drowsiness, or headaches
- difficulty breathing
- burning of skin or eyes
- nausea or loss of appetite

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 _____