

DDT, DDE, and DDD - ToxFAQs™

What are DDT, DDE, and DDD?

DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) is a man-made chemical that does not occur naturally in the environment. It is a white, crystalline solid with no odor or taste. DDE (dichlorodiphenyldichloroethylene) and DDD (dichlorodiphenyldichloroethane) are chemicals similar to DDT that can form when DDT breaks down.



DDT is a pesticide that was once widely used to control insects in agriculture and insects that carry diseases such as malaria. Its use was banned in 1972 because of damage to wildlife but is still used in a limited number of countries where diseases such as malaria are a major health problem. DDE has no commercial use. DDD was also used to kill pests, but its use has also been banned. One form of DDD has been used to treat cancer of the adrenal gland.

What happens to DDT, DDE, and DDD in the environment?

DDT can get into the environment when it is used as a pesticide. DDE and DDD form when DDT breaks down. These chemicals can evaporate into the air from water and moist soil and may then be carried to locations very far from the original source. They can be removed from the air by rain and snow or be broken down by sunlight. DDT, DDE, and DDD stick strongly to the soil and are not likely to move into the groundwater. Microorganisms in the soil slowly break down DDT (it can take anywhere from 2 to 15 years to break down half of the DDT). DDT does not dissolve easily in water and is mostly found in the sediment on the bottom of bodies of water. DDT, DDE, and DDD can build up in plants and animals.

How can I be exposed to DDT, DDE, and DDD?

Most people are not likely to be exposed to DDT, DDE, or DDD. The most common way to be exposed to small amounts of these chemicals is from eating contaminated food such as meat, fish, poultry, and dairy products. If you live near a hazardous waste site, you might be exposed to DDT, DDE, and DDD from contaminated air, dirt, or water.

Since DDT was banned in 1972, exposure to DDT, DDE, and DDD has decreased dramatically. Small amounts may still be found in some food.

How can DDT, DDE, and DDD affect my health?

People who accidentally swallowed large amounts of DDT had tremors, headaches, nausea, and seizures. These effects went away after the exposure stopped. No effects were seen in volunteers who took a small daily dose of DDT by capsule for 18 months. Studies have shown that women with high amounts of DDE in their blood were more likely to have a premature baby or a baby with a wheeze. Exposure to DDT may also increase chances of developing Type II diabetes mellitus in some groups of people.

Animal studies generally used higher amounts of DDT, DDE, and DDD than you would likely be exposed to in the United States. In studies where animals were fed DDT, DDE, or DDD, harmful effects were seen on their nervous system, liver, and reproductive system (including decreased fertility).

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Can DDT, DDE, and DDD cause cancer?

Studies have shown that people with higher levels of DDT in their blood have an increased risk of developing liver cancer. Liver cancer was also seen in animals that were fed DDT over a long period of time.

The [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services \(DHHS\)](#) has determined that DDT may reasonably be anticipated to be a human carcinogen (causing cancer in people).

The [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) has classified DDT, DDE, and DDD as probable human carcinogens.

The [International Agency for Research on Cancer \(IARC\)](#) determined DDT may possibly cause cancer in humans.

Can I get a medical test to check for DDT, DDE, and DDD?

Tests are available to measure levels of DDT, DDE, and DDD in the blood, hair, and breast milk.

These tests cannot predict whether you will have health problems from the exposure to DDT, DDE, and DDD. Doctor's offices do not routinely offer these tests.

How can I protect myself and my family from DDT, DDE, and DDD?

Most people don't need to take any special steps to avoid DDT, DDE, and DDD in their daily lives. Washing fruits and vegetable that come from foreign countries will remove most DDT if any is present. Children should avoid playing in dirt or water near hazardous waste sites to avoid coming in contact with these chemicals.

Follow health advisories that tell you about consumption of fish and wildlife caught in contaminated areas.

For more information:

Call **CDC-INFO** at 1-800-232-4636, or submit your question online at <https://www.cdc.gov/dcs/ContactUs/Form>

Go to ATSDR's Toxicological Profile for DDT, DDE, and DDD: <https://www.cdc.gov/TSP/ToxProfiles/ToxProfiles.aspx?id=81&tid=20>

Go to ATSDR's Toxic Substances Portal: <https://www.cdc.gov/TSP/index.aspx>

Find & contact your ATSDR Regional Representative at http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/DRO/dro_org.html

