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MENU



# Chemical Emergencies

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Chemical agents are poisonous vapors, aerosols, liquids and solids that have toxic effects on people, animals or plants. Chemical agents are unlikely to cause death because they dissipate quickly outdoors and are hard to produce.

Signs of a chemical release include difficulty breathing, eye irritation, loss of coordination, nausea or burning in the nose, throat and lungs. The presence of many dead insects or birds may indicate a chemical agent release.

## Before a Chemical Emergency



Build an [Emergency Supply Kit](#) and include:

Duct tape

Scissors

Plastic (to cover doors, windows and vents)

Make a [Family Emergency Plan](#).

## During a Chemical Emergency

Quickly try to figure out which areas are affected or where the chemical is coming from, if possible.

Get away immediately.

If the chemical is inside your building, get out of the building without passing through the contaminated area, if possible.

If you can't get out of the building or find clean air without passing through the affected area, move as far away as possible and [shelter-in-place](#).

### **If you are instructed to remain in your home or office building, you should:**

Close doors and windows and turn off all ventilation, including furnaces, air conditioners, vents and fans.

Seek shelter in an internal room with your disaster supplies kit.

Seal the room with duct tape and plastic sheeting.

Listen to the radio or television for instructions from authorities.

**If you are caught in or near a contaminated area outdoors:**

Quickly decide what is the fastest way to find clean air:

Move away immediately, in a direction upwind of the source.

Find the closest building to [shelter-in-place](#).

## After a Chemical Emergency

Do not leave the safety of a shelter to go outdoors to help others until authorities say it is safe to do so.

You will need immediate medical attention from a professional if you are affected by a chemical agent. If medical help is not immediately available, decontaminate yourself and help others decontaminate. Use extreme caution when helping others who have been exposed to chemical agents.

How to decontaminate:



Remove all clothing and other items in contact with your body.

Cut off clothing normally removed over the head to avoid contact with the eyes, nose and mouth.

Put contaminated clothing and items into a plastic bag and seal the bag.

Remove eyeglasses or contact lenses. Put glasses in a pan of household bleach to decontaminate them and then rinse and dry.

Wash hands with soap and water.

Flush eyes with water.

Gently wash face and hair with soap and water before thoroughly rinsing with water.

Proceed to a medical facility for screening and professional treatment.

## Related Content

- [Chemical Attack Fact Sheet: Warfare Agents, Industrial Chemicals, and Toxins \(PDF\)](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Chemical Emergencies](#)

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