



Salem/Cumberland County Health Department
PHOSGENE OXIME
(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

What is phosgene oxime?

- It is a manufactured chemical warfare agent.
- When phosgene oxime comes in contact with the skin, it produces intense itching and a rash similar to hives.
- It also causes tissue damage.
- It was first produced in 1929, but it has never been used on the battlefield.
- Phosgene oxime is colorless in its solid form and yellowish-brown when it is a liquid.
- Phosgene oxime has a disagreeable, irritating odor.

What are the symptoms of exposure to phosgene oxime?

Signs and symptoms occur immediately following a phosgene oxime exposure. Phosgene oxime can have the following effects on specific parts of the body:

Skin:

- Pain occurring within a few seconds.
- Whitening of the skin surrounded by red rings occurring on the exposed areas within 30 seconds.
- *After 15 minutes:* hives develop on the skin.
- *After 24 hours:* the whitened areas of skin become brown and die, and then a scab is formed.



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- Itching and pain may continue throughout the healing process.

Eyes:

- Pain
- Irritation
- Tearing
- Possibly temporary blindness

Respiratory tract:

- Immediate irritation of the upper respiratory tract.
- Runny nose
- Hoarseness
- Sinus pain
- Possibly develop fluid in the lungs with symptoms of shortness of breath and cough.

Digestive tract:

No information exists on digestive tract effects in humans.

Showing signs or symptoms does not necessarily mean that a person has been exposed to phosgene oxime.



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Where is phosgene oxime found and how is it used?

Phosgene oxime is not found naturally in the environment. Phosgene oxime vapor is heavier than air, so it will settle in low-lying areas. It does not last very long in the environment. It breaks down in soil within 2 hours when temperatures are normal, and it breaks down in water within a few days.

How are people exposed to phosgene oxime?

People's risk of exposure depends on how close they are to the place where the phosgene oxime was released.

If it is released in the air:

People can be exposed through skin contact or eye contact. They may also be exposed by breathing air that contains phosgene oxime.

If it is released into the water:

People can be exposed by touching or drinking water that contains phosgene oxime.

If liquid phosgene oxime comes in contact with food:

People can be exposed by eating the contaminated food. People can be exposed directly by coming in contact with liquid phosgene oxime.



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What are the long-term health effects of exposure to phosgene oxime?

No information is available on the long-term health effects of phosgene oxime in humans.

How can people protect themselves and what should they do if they are exposed to phosgene oxime?

- Leave the area where the phosgene oxime was released and get to fresh air. Quickly moving to an area where fresh air is available is highly effective in reducing the possibility of death from exposure to lewisite.
 - If the phosgene oxime release was outdoors, move away from the area where the phosgene oxime was released. Go to the highest ground possible, because phosgene oxime is heavier than air and will sink to low-lying areas.
 - If the phosgene oxime release was indoors, get out of the building.
- If you think you may have been exposed, remove your clothing, quickly wash your entire body with soap and water, and get medical care as quickly as possible.
- Removing and disposing of clothing:



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- Quickly take off clothing that has liquid Phosgene oxime on it. Any clothing that has to be pulled over the head should be cut off the body instead of pulled over the head. If possible, seal the clothing in a plastic bag. Then seal the first plastic bag in a second plastic bag. Removing and sealing the clothing in this way will help protect you and other people from any chemicals that might be on your clothes.
 - If you placed your clothes in plastic bags, inform either the local or state health department or emergency personnel upon their arrival. Do not handle the plastic bags.
 - If you are helping other people remove their clothing, try to avoid touching any contaminated areas, and remove the clothing as quickly as possible.
- Washing the body:
- As quickly as possible, wash any liquid phosgene oxime from your skin with large amounts of soap and water. Washing with soap and water will help protect people from any chemicals on their bodies.
 - If your eyes are burning or your vision is blurred, rinse your eyes with plain water for 10 to 15 minutes. If you wear contacts, remove them and place them in the bags with the contaminated clothing. Do not put the contacts back in your eyes. If you wear eyeglasses,



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wash them with soap and water. You can put the eyeglasses back on after you wash them.

- If you have ingested (swallowed) phosgene oxime, do not induce vomiting or drink fluids.
- **Seek medical attention right away. Dial 911 and explain what has happened.**

How is exposure to phosgene oxime treated?

No remedy exists for phosgene oxime. Treatment consists of removing the phosgene oxime from the body as soon as possible and providing supportive medical care in a hospital setting.

Where can people get more information about phosgene oxime?

- Poison Control Center: 1-800-222-1222
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - English: 1-888-246-2675
 - Spanish: 1-888-246-2857