



Salem/Cumberland County Health Department

RICIN

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

What is ricin?

Ricin is a poison that can be made from the waste left over by castor beans. It can be in the form of a powder, a mist, a pellet, or it can be put in water or used as a weak acid.

Where is ricin found, and how is it used?

Castor beans are processed all over the world to make castor oil. Ricin is part of the waste when castor oil is made. Amateurs can make ricin from castor beans. Ricin has some possible medical uses, such as bone marrow transplants and cancer treatment (to kill cancer cells).

How can people be exposed?

It would be a deliberate act to make ricin and use it to poison people. Accidental exposure to ricin is highly unlikely. People can be exposed to ricin in the following ways:

- People can breathe in ricin mist or powder and be poisoned.
- Ricin can get into water or food and then be swallowed.
- Pellets of ricin, or ricin dissolved in a liquid, can be injected into people's bodies.
- Ricin poisoning is not contagious. It cannot be spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms of ricin?

Inhalation

Symptoms would occur within a few hours of inhaling significant amounts of ricin.



Salem/Cumberland County Health Department

RICIN

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

- Coughing
- Tightness in the chest
- Difficult breathing
- Nausea
- Aching muscles

Within the next few hours, the body's airways (such as the lungs) would become very swollen and hot, excess fluid would build up in the lungs, breathing would become even more difficult, and the skin might turn blue.

Ingestion

- Internal bleeding of the stomach and intestines
- Vomiting
- Bloody diarrhea

Eventually, the person's liver, spleen, and kidneys might stop working, and the person could die.

Injection

- Muscle and lymph nodes near the injection site would die.

In time, the liver, kidneys, and spleen would stop working, and the person could have massive bleeding from the stomach and intestines. This person would die from multiple organ failure.

Death from ricin poisoning could take place within 36-48 hours of exposure, whether by injection, ingestion, or inhalation. If the person lives longer than 5 days without complications, he or she will probably not die. Showing the symptoms listed above does not mean that a person has been exposed to ricin.



Salem/Cumberland County Health Department

RICIN

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

How is ricin treated?

There is no antibiotic that treats ricin. Ricin poisoning is treated by giving the victim supportive medical care to minimize the effects of the poisoning. The types of care needed would depend on the route by which the person was poisoned. Care could include such measures as helping the victim breathe and giving him or her I.V. fluids and medicines to treat swelling.

What can people do if they think they are exposed to ricin?

If people think they have been exposed to ricin they should contact the regional poison control center at 1-800-222-1222.

Note: Accidental ricin poisoning is highly unlikely.