



VX (PUBLIC HANDOUT)

What is VX?

VX is a man made chemical warfare agent classified as a nerve agent. It was originally developed in the United Kingdom in the early 1950s. VX is odorless and tasteless. It is an oily liquid that is amber in color and very slow to evaporate. It evaporates about as slowly as motor oil.

What are the symptoms of exposure to VX?

People may not know they were exposed to VX because it has no odor. People exposed to a low or moderate dose of VX by inhalation, swallowing, or skin absorption may experience some or all of the following symptoms within seconds to hours of exposure:

- Runny nose
- Watery eyes
- Small, pinpoint pupils
- Eye pain
- Blurred vision
- Drooling and excessive sweating
- Cough
- Chest tightness
- Rapid breathing
- Diarrhea
- Increased urination
- Confusion
- Drowsiness
- Weakness
- Headache
- Nausea, vomiting, and/or abdominal pain
- Slow or fast heart rate
- Abnormally low or high blood pressure

Even a tiny drop of nerve agent on the skin can cause sweating and muscle twitching where the agent touched the skin. Exposure to a large dose of VX by any way could have these additional health effects:

- Loss of consciousness
- Convulsions
- Paralysis
- Respiratory failure possibly leading to death



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Showing these symptoms does not necessarily mean that a person has been exposed to VX.

Where is VX found and how is it used?

VX is not found in nature. It is possible that VX or other nerve agents were used in chemical warfare during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980's.

How are people exposed to VX?

If it is released into the air:

People can be exposed through skin contact, eye contact, or breathing in the VX mist.

If it is released into the water:

Though VX does not mix with water as easily as other nerve agents do, it could be released into water. Following release of VX into water, people can be exposed by drinking contaminated water or getting contaminated water on their skin.

If it is put in food:

People can be exposed by eating the food it is in.

Also note:

- VX is primarily a liquid exposure hazard, but if it is heated to very high temperatures, it can form into small amounts of gas.
- A person's clothing can release VX for about 30 minutes after contact with VX vapor, which can lead to exposure of other people.
- VX breaks down slowly in the body, meaning that repeated exposures to VX and/or other nerve agents can build up in the body.
- Because VX vapor is heavier than air, it will sink to low-lying areas and create a greater hazard there.

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

Those exposed to mild or moderate doses of VX usually recover completely. Those exposed to large amounts of VX are not likely to survive. Unlike some pesticides, nerve agents have not been associated with problems of the nervous system lasting more than 1-2 weeks after the exposure.



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

Recovery from VX is possible with treatment, but the remedies available must be used quickly to be effective. Therefore, the best thing to do is avoid contact with VX.

- Leave the area where the VX was released and get to fresh air. Quickly moving to an area where fresh air is available is highly effective in reducing the risk of death from exposure to VX.
 - If the VX release was outdoors, move away from the area where the VX was released. Go to the highest ground possible, because VX is heavier than air and will sink to low-lying areas.
 - If the VX 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:
 - Quickly take off clothing that has liquid VX 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 others 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 you can, wash any liquid VX 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.

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- 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 glasses, wash them with soap and water. You can put the glasses back on after you wash them.
- If you have swallowed VX, do not induce vomiting or drink fluids.
- **Seek medical attention right away. Dial 911 and explain what has happened.**

How is exposure to VX treated?

Treatment consists of removing VX from the body as soon as possible and providing supportive medical care in a hospital setting. Remedies are available for VX. They are most useful if given quickly after exposure.

Where can people get more information on VX?

- Poison Control Center: 1-800-222-1222
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - English: 1-888-246-2675
 - Spanish: 1-888-246-2857
 - <http://emergency.cdc.gov/agent/vx/basics/facts.asp>