

METHYL BROMIDE

What is methyl bromide?

Methyl bromide is a chemical used as a pesticide to clean up soil and buildings. At room temperature (70°F), methyl bromide is a colorless gas. It is usually shipped as a liquefied gas. At low concentrations, methyl bromide does not have an odor. At high concentrations, it has a musty or fruity smell.

How can someone come into contact with methyl bromide?

A person can come into contact with methyl bromide by being in an area where the gas is being used as a pesticide to kill insects (in soil or in buildings). Typically, the area is covered with a tent and the gas is pumped in.

Methyl bromide as a weapon: Methyl bromide can be an “agent of opportunity.” This means that someone could explode the vehicle of transportation (truck, train) that is being used to ship the chemical, or destroy tanks that store the chemical. Methyl bromide would then be released into the air.

Methyl bromide also can be manufactured by mixing certain chemicals together to create a gas.

Please note: Just because you come into contact with methyl bromide does not mean you will get sick from it.

What happens if someone gets sick from methyl bromide?

Signs of a poisoning include the following:

- redness and pain of the skin
- blisters
- burning of the eyes, mouth and nose
- nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- kidney problems
- cough
- chest tightness
- fluid in the lungs
- dizziness
- headache
- confusion
- lack of energy
- seizures
- coma
- low blood pressure
- rapid heart rate

How likely is someone to die from methyl bromide poisoning?

The effects of methyl bromide will depend on the concentration of exposure, length of time and way the person is exposed. A highly concentrated solution or large amount in the air is more likely to cause severe effects, including death.

What is the treatment for methyl bromide poisoning?

- **Prevention of illness after contact:** First, leave the area where the methyl bromide was released and move to fresh air.
 - **Remove clothing.**
 - Then, quickly take off clothing that may have methyl bromide on it. If possible, any clothing that has to be pulled over the head should be cut off the body instead so the chemical does not get near the eyes, mouth or nose. If helping other people remove their clothing, try to avoid touching any contaminated areas.

(Methyl bromide continued)

- **Wash affected areas.**
 - As quickly as possible, wash any methyl bromide from the skin with lots of soap and water.
 - If the eyes are burning or vision is blurred, rinse your eyes with plain water for 10 to 15 minutes.
 - If contact lenses are worn, remove them and put them with the contaminated clothing. Do not put the contacts back in. If eyeglasses are worn, wash them with soap and water. Eyeglasses can be put back on after they are washed.
 - If you are wearing jewelry that you can wash with soap and water, wash it and put it back on. If it cannot be washed, put it with the contaminated clothing.
- **Discard contaminated items.**
 - Place the clothing and any other contaminated items inside a plastic bag. Avoid touching contaminated areas of the clothing. If you can't avoid touching contaminated areas, or you aren't sure where the contaminated areas are, wear rubber gloves or use tongs, sticks or similar objects. Anything that touches the contaminated clothing should also be placed in the bag.
 - Seal the bag, and then seal that bag inside another plastic bag.
 - Call the local county health department right away. (Visit www.idph.state.il.us//local/alpha.htm for a listing of all county health departments in Illinois or check your local phone book.)
 - When the local or state health department or emergency personnel arrive, tell them what you did with your clothes. The health department or emergency personnel will arrange for further disposal. Do not handle the plastic bags yourself.
- **Treatment of illness:** There is no specific treatment for methyl bromide poisoning. Supportive care (intravenous fluids, medicine to control pain) is the standard treatment.

Is there a vaccine for methyl bromide poisoning?

No, there is no vaccine for methyl bromide poisoning.

What should be done if someone comes into contact with methyl bromide?

If you think that you or someone you know may have come into contact with methyl bromide, contact the local county health department right away. (Visit www.idph.state.il.us//local/alpha.htm for a listing of all county health departments in Illinois or check your local phone book.)

If you or someone you know is showing symptoms of methyl bromide poisoning, call your health care provider or the Illinois Poison Center right away. The toll-free number for the poison center is 1-800-222-1222.

Where can one get more information about methyl bromide?

- U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry www.atsdr.cdc.gov/MHMI/mmg16.html
- Illinois Department of Public Health www.idph.state.il.us
- Illinois Poison Center www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org