

TRICHOTHECENE MYCOTOXIN

What is trichothecene mycotoxin?

Trichothecene mycotoxin (T-2) is a naturally occurring poison produced by fungi. This poison can slow down the production of protein and nucleic acid in the body. A purified form of T-2 may have been used in Laos and Cambodia (1975-1981), in Kampuchea (1979-1981) and in Afghanistan (1979-1981). It has been described as “yellow rain” because it is a yellow fluid.

How can someone come into contact T-2 mycotoxin?

T-2 cannot be spread from person to person. Accidental contact with large amounts of T-2 is not likely; it would take a planned act to make T-2 and use it to poison a large number of people.

T-2 as a weapon: T-2 can be aerosolized and released into the air. T-2 also can enter the body through the skin and digestive tract, without being breathed in.

Please note: Just because you come into contact with T-2 does not mean you will get sick from it.

What happens if someone gets sick from T-2 mycotoxin?

The symptoms of T-2 poisoning include the following:

- Severe itching and redness of the skin, sores, shedding of the skin
- Distortion of any of the senses, loss of the ability to coordinate muscle movement
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- Nose and throat pain, discharge from the nose, itching and sneezing
- Cough, difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest pain and spitting up blood
- Temporary bleeding disorders

Severe poisoning can result in weakness, shock and death.

How likely is someone to die from T-2 mycotoxin poisoning?

The effects of T-2 mycotoxin poisoning will depend on the concentration of exposure, length of time and way the person is exposed. A highly concentrated solution or large amount of the gas is more likely to cause severe effects, including death.

The likeliness of T-2 mycotoxin causing someone to die is unknown. It is estimated that more than 6,000 people were killed by the “yellow rain” in Laos.

What is the treatment for T-2 mycotoxin poisoning?

- **Prevention of illness after contact:** First, leave the area where the T-2 mycotoxin was released and move to fresh air.
 - **Remove clothing.**
 - Then, quickly take off clothing that may have T-2 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.
 - **Wash affected areas.**
 - As quickly as possible, wash any T-2 from the skin with lots of soap and water.

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- 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 T-2 poisoning. Supportive care (intravenous fluids, medicine to control pain) is the standard treatment.

Is there a vaccine for T-2 mycotoxin poisoning?

No, there is no vaccine for T-2 poisoning.

What should be done if someone comes into contact with T-2 mycotoxin?

If you think that you or someone you know may have come into contact with T-2, 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 T-2 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 T-2 mycotoxin?

- Illinois Department of Public Health www.idph.state.il.us
- Illinois Poison Center www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org