



ToxFAQs Internet address via WWW is <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaq.html>

in gas stations have reported having headaches, nausea, dizziness, and mental confusion. However, the actual levels of exposure in these cases are unknown. In addition, these symptoms may have been caused by exposure to other chemicals.

There are no data on the effects in people of drinking MTBE. Studies with rats and mice suggest that drinking MTBE may cause gastrointestinal irritation, liver and kidney damage, and nervous system effects.

### How likely is MTBE to cause cancer?

There is no evidence that MTBE causes cancer in humans. One study with rats found that breathing high levels of MTBE for long periods may cause kidney cancer. Another study with mice found that breathing high levels of MTBE for long periods may cause liver cancer.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), and the EPA have not classified MTBE as to its carcinogenicity.

### Is there a medical test to show whether I've been exposed to MTBE?

MTBE and its breakdown product, butyl alcohol, can be detected in your breath, blood, or urine for up to 1 or 2 days after exposure. These tests aren't available at most doctors' offices, but can be done at special laboratories that have the right equipment. There is no other test specific to determining MTBE exposure.

### Has the federal government made recommendations to protect human health?

The EPA has issued guidelines recommending that, to protect children, drinking water levels of MTBE not exceed 4 milligrams per liter of water (4 mg/L) for an exposure of 1-10 days, and 3 mg/L for longer-term exposures.

The American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH) has recommended an exposure limit of 40 parts of MTBE per million parts of air (40 ppm) for an 8-hour workday, 40-hour workweek.

### Glossary

Carcinogenicity: Ability to cause cancer.

CAS: Chemical Abstracts Service.

Evaporate: To change into a vapor or gas.

Milligram (mg): One thousandth of a gram.

ppm: Parts per million.

Sediment: Mud and debris that have settled to the bottom of a body of water.

### Source of Information

This ToxFAQs information is taken from the 1996 Toxicological Profile for Methyl *tert*-Butyl Ether produced by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service in Atlanta, GA.

Animal testing is sometimes necessary to find out how toxic substances might harm people and how to treat people who have been exposed. Laws today protect the welfare of research animals and scientists must follow strict guidelines.

**Where can I get more information?** For more information, contact the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Division of Toxicology, 1600 Clifton Road NE, Mailstop E-29, Atlanta, GA 30333. Phone: 1-888-422-8737, FAX: 404-498-0093. ToxFAQs Internet address via WWW is <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaq.html> ATSDR can tell you where to find occupational and environmental health clinics. Their specialists can recognize, evaluate, and treat illnesses resulting from exposure to hazardous substances. You can also contact your community or state health or environmental quality department if you have any more questions or concerns.

