

This fact sheet answers the most frequently asked health questions (FAQs) about dichlorobenzenes. For more information, call the ATSDR Information Center at 1-888-422-8737. This fact sheet is one in a series of summaries about hazardous substances and their health effects. It is important you understand this information because these substances may harm you. The effects of exposure to any hazardous substance depend on the dose, the duration, how you are exposed, personal traits and habits, and whether other chemicals are present.

HIGHLIGHTS: Exposure to dichlorobenzenes mostly occurs from breathing indoor air or workplace air. Exposure to high levels of 1,2- or 1,4-dichlorobenzene may be very irritating to your eyes and nose and cause difficult breathing, and an upset stomach. Extremely high exposures to 1,4-dichlorobenzene can result in dizziness, headaches, and liver problems. Liver effects have been observed in animals exposed to high levels of dichlorobenzenes. 1,2-, 1,3-, and 1,4-Dichlorobenzenes have been identified in at least 280, 176, and 331, respectively, of the 1,647 National Priorities List sites identified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

What are dichlorobenzenes?

There are three dichlorobenzene isomers—1,2-dichlorobenzene, 1,3-dichlorobenzene, and 1,4-dichlorobenzene. Dichlorobenzenes do not occur naturally. 1,2-Dichlorobenzene is a colorless to pale yellow liquid used to make herbicides. 1,3-Dichlorobenzene is a colorless liquid used to make herbicides, insecticides, medicine, and dyes. 1,4-Dichlorobenzene, the most important of the three chemicals, is a colorless to white solid with a strong, pungent odor. When exposed to air, it slowly changes from a solid to a vapor. Most people can smell 1,4-dichlorobenzene in the air at very low levels.

What happens to dichlorobenzenes when they enter the environment?

- 1,4-Dichlorobenzene enters the environment when it is used in mothballs and in toilet-deodorizer blocks. Very little enters the environment from hazardous waste sites.
- Some 1,2- and 1,3-dichlorobenzenes are released into the environment when used to make herbicides and when people use products that contain these chemicals.
- Dichlorobenzenes do not dissolve easily in water, the small amounts that enter water quickly evaporate into the air.
- Sometimes, dichlorobenzenes bind to soil and sediment. Dichlorobenzenes in soil usually are not easily broken down by soil organisms. Evidence suggests that plants and fish absorb dichlorobenzenes.

How might I be exposed to dichlorobenzenes?

- You may be exposed to 1,4-dichlorobenzene by breathing vapors from products used in the home or in buildings, such as air fresheners, mothballs and toilet-deodorizer blocks. 1,2- and 1,3-Dichlorobenzene are not found frequently in the air of homes and buildings because these chemicals are not used in household products.
- You may be exposed to very low levels of dichlorobenzenes in drinking water. You are not likely to be exposed to dichlorobenzenes in soil.
- You may also be exposed to low levels of dichlorobenzenes in beef, pork, chicken, eggs, baked goods, soft drinks, butter, peanut butter, fruits, vegetables, and fish.

How can dichlorobenzenes affect my health?

Very little is known about the health effects of 1,3-dichlorobenzene, especially in humans, but they are likely to be similar to those of 1,2- and 1,4-dichlorobenzene. Inhaling the vapor or dusts of 1,2-dichlorobenzene and 1,4-dichlorobenzene at very high concentrations could be very irritating to your eyes and nose and cause burning and tearing of the eyes, coughing, difficult breathing, and an upset stomach. Dizziness, headaches, and liver problems have also been observed in people exposed to very high levels of 1,4-dichlorobenzene.

People who have eaten 1,4-dichlorobenzene products regularly for long periods (months to years) developed skin

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blotches and anemia. 1,4-Dichlorobenzene might cause a burning feeling in your skin if you hold mothballs or toilet-deodorizer blocks against your skin for a long time. Breathing or eating any of the dichlorobenzenes caused harmful effects in the liver of laboratory animals. Animal studies also found that 1,2- and 1,4-dichlorobenzene caused effects in the kidneys and blood, and that 1,3-dichlorobenzene caused thyroid and pituitary effects.

How likely are dichlorobenzenes to cause cancer?

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has determined that 1,4-dichlorobenzene may reasonably be anticipated to be a carcinogen. There is no direct evidence that 1,4-dichlorobenzene can cause cancer in humans. However, animals given very high levels in water developed liver and kidney tumors.

1,2-Dichlorobenzene was not carcinogenic in laboratory animals and 1,3-dichlorobenzene has not been tested for its potential to cause cancer. Both the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the EPA concluded that 1,2- and 1,3-dichlorobenzene are not classifiable as to human carcinogenicity.

How can dichlorobenzenes affect children?

Children who are exposed to dichlorobenzenes are likely to exhibit the same effects as adults, although this is not known for certain.

Children can also be exposed to dichlorobenzenes prenatally, because all three isomers have been detected in placenta samples, as well as through breast feeding. There is no reliable evidence suggesting that dichlorobenzenes cause birth defects, although animal data raise concern for effects of 1,4-dichlorobenzene on postnatal development of the nervous system.

How can families reduce the risk of exposure to dichlorobenzenes?

Exposure of children to 1,4-dichlorobenzene can be minimized by discouraging them from playing with, swallowing, or having skin contact with products containing 1,4-dichlorobenzene. These items should be stored out of reach of young children and kept in their original containers

to prevent accidental poisonings. Keep your Poison Control Center's number by the phone.

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

Several tests can be used to show if you have been exposed to dichlorobenzenes. The most commonly used tests measure their dichlorophenol breakdown products in urine and blood. The presence of the dichlorophenol breakdown products in the urine indicates a person has been exposed to dichlorobenzenes within the previous day or two. Another test measures the levels of dichlorobenzenes in your blood, but this is used less often. These tests require special equipment that is not routinely available in a doctor's office, but they can be performed in a special laboratory. Neither of these tests can be used to show how high the level of dichlorobenzene exposure was or to predict whether harmful health effects will follow.

Has the federal government made recommendations to protect human health?

EPA regulates the levels of dichlorobenzenes that are allowable in drinking water. The highest level of 1,4-dichlorobenzene allowed in drinking water is 0.075 parts 1,4-dichlorobenzene per 1 million parts of water (0.075 ppm). The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has set a limit for 1,4-dichlorobenzene of 75 parts 1,4-dichlorobenzene per 1 million parts of air (75 ppm) in the workplace.

Reference

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). 2004. Toxicological Profile for Dichlorobenzenes (Draft for Public Comment). Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service.

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 F-32, Atlanta, GA 30333. Phone: 1-888-422-8737, FAX: 770-488-4178. 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.

