

Chemical Emergencies

A chemical emergency occurs when toxic chemicals are released into the air, put in food or released in water during an accident or attack. The chemicals may be gases, liquids or solids. The chemicals may be harmful to people and the environment. Chemicals may harm people if they are breathed in, absorbed through the skin or swallowed.

Watch for signs of a chemical emergency such as:

- Watery eyes
- Shortness of breath or choking
- Problems with movement or walking
- Confused thoughts
- Twitching movements
- Burning skin

An increase in sick or dead birds, fish or small animals may be another sign of a chemical emergency.

During a Chemical Emergency

Listen for reports on the television, radio or Internet.

- Local or state officials will let you know what signs to look for.
- Officials will tell you whether to stay inside or leave your home.
- If you are told to stay inside:
 - Turn off all furnaces, air conditioners and fans.
 - Close vents.
 - Close and lock all doors and windows.

If you feel sick, call your doctor right away or go to the hospital.

If you see a chemical release:

- Leave the area right away.
- Cover your nose and mouth with fabric to filter the air but still allow breathing.
- Find shelter.
 - If the chemical is in a building, leave the building without passing through the chemical. If you cannot leave the building, move as far away as you can from the chemical.

- If you are outside, find the fastest way to get away from the chemical. If you can tell which way the wind is blowing, move in the opposite direction or upwind. If you cannot stay upwind or get away from the chemical, go inside a building.
- Call the police if they are not aware of the chemical emergency.

If you have gotten some chemical on you or you think you may have gotten some chemical on you:

- Take off your clothes and put them in a plastic bag. Seal the bag tightly.
- Take a shower or wash your skin and hair well with soap and water. Do not scrub the chemical into your skin. If outside, look for a hose or any source of water.
- Put on clean clothes.
- Seek medical care if you have signs of a chemical emergency.

If certain chemicals get on people, officials may have them go through **decontamination**. This involves removing clothes and showering to wash the chemicals from the skin. This may be done in a portable shower unit.