



Ricin

What is ricin?

Ricin is a poison found naturally in castor beans. If beans are chewed and swallowed, a person can be injured by that poison. Ricin also can be made from waste left over after processing castor beans. It may be made as a powder, mist, pellet or liquid.

What are the types and symptoms of ricin exposure?

Accidental exposure is very unlikely. Someone would need to make ricin and use it to poison people on purpose. The type of exposure would depend on how the ricin was made.

- Inhalation (lung): The early symptoms of inhaling large amounts of ricin are difficulty breathing, fever, cough, nausea, and tightness in the chest. As ricin builds up in the lungs, heavy sweating and increased difficulty breathing occur. The skin may turn blue. Symptoms usually occur within eight hours of exposure.
- Ingestion (by mouth): A person who swallows a large amount of ricin will vomit and have loose watery or bloody stools, which usually lead to dehydration. Other symptoms may include low blood pressure, seizures or bloody urine. Symptoms usually occur in less than six hours after exposure.
- Skin and eye exposure: Ricin in the powder or mist form may cause redness and pain to the skin and eyes.

How is ricin poisoning treated?

There is no cure for ricin poisoning. It is treated by giving medical care to decrease the effects of the poison. The medical care provided depends on the type of exposure (lung, by mouth, or eyes and skin).

Is it spread from person to person?

No.

Can ricin be used as a bioterrorist weapon?

Yes. This poison could be used to contaminate the food, water, or air supply.

What should I do if I am exposed to ricin?

- Leave the area where the ricin was released immediately and seek fresh air.
- Remove any clothing that may have ricin on it as quickly as possible. Avoid touching the contaminated areas. Use tongs or gloves to put the clothing in a plastic bag. Seal the bag and then place it inside another plastic bag and seal that too.
- Wash your body with large amounts of soap and water to get the ricin off your skin.
- If your eyes are burning or your vision is blurred, rinse your eyes out with large amounts of clean water. If you wear contacts, remove them and DO NOT put them back in. Glasses may be worn after they are cleaned.
- If someone has ingested ricin, do not induce vomiting or give fluid to drink.
- Call 9-1-1 right away and seek medical attention.

For more information on ricin, call the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 336-641-7777, visit our website at www.myguilford.com or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov