



Iowa Department of Public Health Bureau of Environmental Health Services

Toluene Chemical Fact Sheet

Overview: Toluene is a clear, colorless liquid. It occurs naturally in crude oil. Toluene is found in gasoline, fuels, and solvents.

How are people exposed to toluene?

The most likely way for someone to be exposed to toluene is by breathing in vapors from gasoline-type products or cigarette smoke.

Sometimes, toluene can get into water below ground. This can happen if gasoline leaks out from where it's being stored into the ground. Leaking underground and above ground storage tanks can be common sources of groundwater pollution. Some of this groundwater may be used for drinking water.

To know if you've been exposed to a chemical, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Did I breathe it in?
2. Did I touch it?
3. Did I swallow it?

If you answered "no" to all three questions, you were not exposed.

How does exposure to toluene affect my health?

Inhaling high levels of toluene in a short time can make you feel light-headed, dizzy, or sleepy. It can also cause unconsciousness, and even death in very high amounts.

The health impact from exposure to toluene may vary from person to person. In general, chemicals affect the same organs in all people who are exposed.

If you come in contact with a chemical, the amount and length of time can affect your reaction.

How you react to a chemical depends on:

- your health
- your genetics
- your previous exposure to chemicals (including medicine)
- your personal habits, such as smoking and drinking.

Does toluene cause cancer?

There is not enough information to know if toluene causes cancer.

How do I reduce my exposure to toluene?

Limit your exposure to products containing toluene.

- Store paint, paint thinners, and gasoline products in air tight containers to prevent vapors from getting into the air.
- Keep windows open and fans running when you use paint thinners and gasoline-type products.

- Do not smoke in the home, in enclosed places, or near children.
- If you believe your drinking water well has been polluted with gasoline, stop using the water. Then get your water tested.

Are there standards for regulating toluene?

Water: The EPA has set the maximum not-to-exceed level of toluene in drinking water at 1 mg per liter, or 1 part toluene per million parts of water (1 ppm).

Air: We do not have any standards or regulations for the amount of toluene that can be in the air of homes. People can usually smell toluene at much lower levels than what is considered harmful to human health.

References:

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). ToxFAQs for Toluene.

This fact sheet summarizes information about this chemical and is not a complete listing of all possible effects. It does not refer to work exposure or emergency situations.

Who should I contact if I want more information?

- Poison Control Center: 800-222-1222
- Your local public health agency
- Iowa Department of Public Health



<http://idph.iowa.gov/>

- Iowa Department of Natural Resources



<http://www.iowadnr.gov/>