

CAROLINE CALDERONE BAISLEY
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH



MICHAEL LONG, Director
DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
DOUGLAS SERAFIN, Laboratory
JENNIFER JOHNSON, Director
DIVISION OF FAMILY HEALTH
THOMAS MAHONEY, Director
SPECIAL CLINICAL SERVICES
STEPHANIE PAULMENO, Director
COMMUNITY HEALTH PLANNING

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT RICIN

What is Ricin?

- Ricin is a poison that can be made from the waste left over from processing castor beans.
- It can be in the form of powder, mist, or pellet, or can be dissolved in water or weak acid.
- It is a stable substance, therefore, not affected much by very hot or very cold temperatures.

How can you be exposed to Ricin?

- It would take a deliberate act to make ricin and use it to poison people. Accidental exposure is unlikely.
- People can breathe in ricin mist or powder and be poisoned.
- Ricin can get into water or food and then be swallowed.
- Pellets of ricin, or ricin dissolved in a liquid, can be injected into people's bodies.
- Ricin poisoning is not contagious. It **cannot** be spread from person to person through casual contact.

What are the symptoms of ricin poisoning?

- The symptoms of ricin poisoning vary depending on whether exposure has come from inhalation, ingestion, injection, or skin or eye exposure, and the dose of ricin received.
- Initial symptoms of ricin poisoning by inhalation may occur within 8 hours of exposure. Following ingestion, symptoms typically occur in less than 6 hours.
- Death from ricin could occur within 36-72 hours of exposure, depending on route of exposure and dose received.

Inhalation: Within a few hours of inhaling significant amounts of ricin, the likely symptoms would be:

- Difficulty breathing
- Fever
- Cough
- Nausea
- Chest Tightness
- Heavy sweating may follow, as well as fluid building up in the lungs.
- Heavy sweating and fluid build-up would make breathing more difficult, and skin may turn blue.
- Low blood pressure and respiratory failure may occur, leading to death.
- People having respiratory symptoms that started within 12 hours of inhaling ricin should **seek medical care**.

Ingestion: If a significant amount of ricin were to be swallowed, the person would develop:

- Vomiting and diarrhea that may become bloody.
- Severe dehydration, followed by low blood pressure.
- Other symptoms may include hallucinations, seizures, and blood in the urine. Within several days, the liver, spleen, and kidneys may stop working and the person could die.

Skin and eye exposure: Ricin in powder or mist form can cause:

- Redness and pain of the skin and the eyes

What can be done to help those who have been exposed to ricin? What are the treatments and what is the cure?

- ❑ There is no cure for ricin poisoning.
- ❑ If ricin exposure cannot be avoided, the most important factor is getting the ricin off the body as quickly as possible.
- ❑ Ricin poisoning is treated by giving victims medical care to minimize the effects of poisoning. The type of medical care would depend on the manner by which the person was poisoned.

How can you protect yourself if you are exposed to ricin?

- ❑ First, leave the location where the ricin was released. Moving to an area with fresh air is a good way to reduce the possibility of death from exposure to ricin.
- ❑ If you are near a release of ricin, emergency coordinators may tell you to evacuate the area or to shelter inside a building.
- ❑ If you think you may have been exposed to ricin, remove your clothing, quickly wash your entire body with soap and water, and **get immediate medical care.**
- ❑ **Removing your clothing:**
 - Quickly take off clothing that may have ricin on it. Any clothing that needs to be pulled over the head should be cut from the body instead.
 - If you are helping others remove their clothing, try to avoid touching any contaminated areas, and remove the clothing as quickly as possible.
- ❑ **Washing yourself:**
 - As quickly as possible, wash any ricin from your skin with large amounts of soap and water.
 - If your eyes are burning or your vision blurred, rinse your eyes with plain water for 10-15 minutes.
 - If you are wearing contact lenses, remove them and put them with the contaminated clothing. If you are wearing glasses, remove them. Wash them with soap and water before putting them back on.
- ❑ **Disposing of your clothes:**
 - After you have washed yourself, place clothing in a plastic bag. Avoid touching contaminated areas of the clothing. If you are not sure that you can avoid touching contaminated areas, wear rubber gloves, turn the bag inside out and use it to pick up the clothing, or use tongs, tool handles, sticks, or similar objects. Anything that touches the clothes should be placed in the bag as well. If you wear contact lenses, put them in the bag too.
 - Seal the bag. Then seal the bag with the contaminated items inside another plastic bag.
 - When the health department or emergency personnel arrive, tell them what you did with your clothes. They will arrange for further disposal. Do not handle the bags yourself.
- ❑ If someone has ingested ricin, do not induce vomiting or give fluids to drink.
- ❑ Always seek medical attention for any form of ricin exposure. Dial 911 and explain what has happened.

Where can I find general information about ricin?

See the ricin fact sheet at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/ricin/facts.asp>

Also see the Greenwich Department of Health website at <http://www.greenwichct.org/HealthDept/HealthDept.asp>

The Greenwich Department of Health phone number is as follows:

(203) 622- 7838

Town of Greenwich Emergency Hotline (activated in the event of emergency) is as follows:

(866) 245- 4260

