

PARAQUAT FACT SHEET

What is paraquat?

Paraquat is a toxic liquid chemical that is widely used as a plant killer. Only licensed applicators are legally permitted to use paraquat. Safeguard additives (blue dye, a sharp odor, and an added agent) are sometimes used in the chemical to avoid confusion with other products and to cause vomiting in case someone drinks it.

How can you be exposed to paraquat?

The most common route of exposure is through ingestion. You may not know that the food, water or other drinks are paraquat-contaminated, if the safeguard additives are not used. You can also be exposed through inhalation or the skin being exposed for a long period of time.

What are the immediate symptoms of exposure paraquat?

After a person ingests a large amount of paraquat, he or she is likely to immediately have pain and swelling of the mouth and throat. The next signs of illness following ingestion are gastrointestinal (digestive tract) symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and diarrhea (which may become bloody).

Ingestion of small to medium amounts of paraquat may lead to development of the following adverse health effects within several days to several weeks:

- Liver failure
- Kidney failure
- Heart failure
- Lung scarring (may evolve over several weeks)

In general, ingestion of large amounts of paraquat leads to the following signs/symptoms within a few hours to a few days:

- Pulmonary edema (fluid in the lungs)
- Lung scarring (evolves more quickly than when small to medium amounts have been ingested)
- Liver failure
- Kidney failure
- Confusion
- Coma
- Seizures
- Injury to the heart
- Fast heart rate

- Muscle weakness
- Respiratory (breathing) failure, possibly leading to death

What are the long-term health effects of exposure to paraquat?

If a person survives the toxic effects of paraquat poisoning, long-term lung damage (scarring) is highly likely. Other long-term effects may also occur, including kidney failure, heart failure, and esophageal strictures (scarring of the swallowing tube that makes it hard for a person to swallow). People with high-dose exposure to paraquat are not likely to survive.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to paraquat?

If the poison was ingested, avoid any further ingestion and **call 911 at once**. If you think you have been exposed to liquid paraquat on your clothes or body, remove your clothing and quickly wash your entire body with soap and water. If your eyes are burning or your vision is blurred, rinse them with plain water for 10 to 15 minutes. If you wear contact lenses, remove them before rinsing your eyes. Place your contaminated clothes and contact lenses into a plastic bag and seal. Place the bag into a second plastic bag and seal. **Call 911 for medical attention right away and removal of the contaminated items. Do not drive yourself to the hospital as you may become very ill on your way.**

Where can I get more information on paraquat?

Regional Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222)

www.bt.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

Source of information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)