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Cloth dye poisoning

Cloth dyes are chemicals used to color cloth. Cloth dye poisoning occurs when someone swallows large amounts of these substances.

This article is for information only. DO NOT use it to treat or manage an actual poison exposure. If you or someone you are with has an exposure, call your local emergency number (such as 911), or your local poison control center can be reached directly by calling the national toll-free Poison Help hotline (1-800-222-1222) from anywhere in the United States.

Poisonous Ingredient

The poisonous ingredient in cloth dye is corrosive alkali.

Today it is rare to find this poisonous ingredient in most household cloth dyes.

Most common household cloth dyes are made from nonpoisonous substances, such as:

- Mild soaps
- Pigments
- Salts

Although these substances are generally considered not dangerous, they can cause problems if swallowed in large amounts, especially in small children.

Where Found

This substance is found in certain dyes used to color clothing or fabric.

Symptoms

Cloth dye poisoning can cause symptoms in many parts of the body.

AIRWAYS AND LUNGS

- Breathing difficulty (from breathing in the dye)
- Throat swelling (may also cause breathing difficulty)

BLOOD

- Severe change in acid level of blood (pH balance), which leads to damage in all of the body organs

EYES, EARS, NOSE, AND THROAT

- Loss of vision
- Severe pain in the throat
- Severe pain or burning in the nose, eyes, ears, lips, or tongue

GASTROINTESTINAL SYSTEM

- Blood in the stool
- Burns and possible holes (perforations) in the esophagus
- Severe abdominal pain
- Vomiting
- Vomiting blood

HEART AND CIRCULATORY SYSTEM

- Collapse
- Low blood pressure that develops rapidly (shock)

SKIN

- Burns
- Holes (necrosis) in the skin or tissues underneath
- Irritation

Home Care

Seek medical help right away. Do not make a person throw up unless told to do so by poison control or a health care provider.

If the chemical was swallowed, immediately give the person water or milk, unless instructed otherwise by a provider. Do not give water or milk if the person is having symptoms (such as vomiting, convulsions, or a decreased level of alertness) that make it hard to swallow.

If the chemical is on the skin or in the eyes, flush with lots of water for at least 15 minutes.

If the person breathed in the poison, immediately move them to fresh air.

Before Calling Emergency

Get the following information:

- Person's age, weight, and condition
- Name of the product (and ingredients and strength, if known)

- Time it was swallowed
- Amount swallowed

Poison Control

Your local poison control center can be reached directly by calling the national toll-free Poison Help hotline (1-800-222-1222) from anywhere in the United States. This national hotline will let you talk to experts in poisoning. They will give you further instructions.

This is a free and confidential service. All local poison control centers in the United States use this national number. You should call if you have any questions about poisoning or poison prevention. It does NOT need to be an emergency. You can call for any reason, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

What to Expect at the Emergency Room

The provider will measure and monitor the person's vital signs, including temperature, pulse, breathing rate, and blood pressure. Symptoms will be treated as appropriate. The person may receive:

- Blood and urine tests
- Breathing support, including oxygen through a tube into the lungs, and a breathing machine (ventilator)
- Bronchoscopy -- camera down the throat to look for burns in the airways and lungs (if the poison was inhaled)
- Chest x-ray
- Electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Endoscopy -- camera down the throat to look for burns in the esophagus and the stomach
- Fluids through a vein (by IV)
- Medicine to reverse the effect of the poison and treat symptoms
- Surgical removal of burned skin (skin debridement)
- Tube through the mouth into the stomach to aspirate (suck out) the stomach. This is done only when the person gets medical care within 30 to 45 minutes of the poisoning, and a very large amount of the substance has been swallowed
- Washing of the skin (irrigation) -- perhaps every few hours for several days

Outlook (Prognosis)

How well a person does depends on the amount of poison swallowed and how quickly treatment is received. The faster the person gets medical help, the better the chance for recovery.

If the poisoning involved a corrosive alkali, extensive damage may occur to the:

- Esophagus
- Kidneys
- Mouth
- Stomach
- Throat

The outcome depends on the extent of this damage. Poisoning from dye containing an alkali may result in continuing injury to these tissues for weeks or months.

Swallowing such poisons can have severe effects on many parts of the body. Burns in the airway or gastrointestinal tract can lead to tissue death. This may result in infection, shock, and death, even several months after substance was swallowed. Scar tissue in the affected areas can lead to long-term problems with breathing, swallowing, and digestion.

If the person swallowed a nonpoisonous household dye, recovery is likely.

Alternative Names

Dyes - cloth

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