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Grass and weed killer poisoning

Many weed killers contain dangerous chemicals that are harmful if swallowed. This article discusses poisoning by swallowing weed killers containing a chemical called glyphosate.

This is for information only and not for use in the treatment or management of an actual poison exposure. If you have an exposure, you should call your local emergency number (such as 911) or the 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

Glyphosate is the poisonous ingredient in some weed killers.

Surfactants, such as polyoxyethyleneamine (POEA), are also found in many of the same weed killers, and can also be toxic.

Where Found

Glyphosate is in many weed killers, including those with these brand names:

- Roundup
- Bronco
- Glifonox
- Kleen-up
- Rodeo
- Weedoff

Other products may also contain glyphosate.

Symptoms

Symptoms of glyphosate poisoning include:

- Abdominal cramps
- Anxiety
- Breathing difficulty

- Coma
- Blue lips or fingernails (rare)
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Headache
- Irritation in the mouth and throat
- Low blood pressure
- Nausea and vomiting (may vomit blood)
- Weakness
- Kidney failure
- Slow heart rate

Home Care

Seek medical help right away. DO NOT make a person throw up unless poison control or a health care provider tells you to. If the chemical is on the skin or in the eyes, flush with lots of water for at least 15 minutes.

Before Calling Emergency

Have this information ready:

- Person's age, weight, and condition
- Name of the product (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. 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

Take the container with you to the hospital, if possible.

Exposure to glyphosate is not as harmful as exposure to other phosphates. But contact with a very large amount of it can cause severe symptoms. Care will begin by contaminating the person while starting other treatments.

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

- Blood and urine tests.
- Breathing support, including oxygen. They may be placed on a breathing machine with a tube through the mouth into the throat, if needed.
- Chest x-ray.
- ECG (electrocardiogram, or heart tracing).
- Intravenous fluids (through a vein).
- Medicines to reverse the effects of the poison and treat symptoms.
- Tube placed down the nose and into the stomach (sometimes).
- Washing of the skin (irrigation). This may need to be continued for several days.

Outlook (Prognosis)

People who continue to improve over the first 4 to 6 hours after receiving medical treatment usually fully recover.

Keep all chemicals, cleaners, and industrial products in their original containers and marked as poison, and out of the reach of children. This will reduce the risk of poisoning and overdose.

Alternative Names

Weedoff poisoning; Roundup poisoning

References

Welker KL, Thompson TM. Pesticides. In: Walls RM, ed. *Rosen's Emergency Medicine: Concepts and Clinical Practice*. 10th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2023:chap 152.

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