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## Fuel oil poisoning

Fuel oil poisoning occurs when someone swallows, breathes in (inhales), or touches fuel oil.

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

Substances called hydrocarbons are the harmful ingredients in fuel oil.

### Where Found

Hydrocarbons are found in:

- Fuel oil
- Kerosene
- Gasoline

There may be other sources of fuel oil or other chemicals contained in the fuel oil.

### Symptoms

Below are symptoms of fuel oil poisoning in different parts of the body.

#### EYES, EARS, NOSE, AND THROAT

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

#### STOMACH AND INTESTINES

- Abdominal pain
- Blood in the stool

- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Vomiting (may contain blood)

## HEART AND BLOOD

- Collapse
- Low blood pressure that develops rapidly

## LUNGS

- Breathing difficulty (from breathing the fumes)
- Throat swelling (which may also cause breathing difficulty)

## NERVOUS SYSTEM

- Depression
- Difficulty concentrating
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Feeling of being drunk (euphoria)
- Headaches
- Lightheadedness
- Loss of alertness (unconsciousness)
- Seizures (convulsions)
- Staggering
- Weakness

## SKIN

- Blisters
- Burn
- Irritation
- Peeling of the skin

## Home Care

Get medical help right away. Do not make the person throw up unless poison control or a health care provider tells you to.

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

If the person swallowed the fuel oil, give them water or milk right away, unless poison control or a provider tells you not to. Do not give anything to drink if the person has symptoms that make it hard to swallow. These include vomiting, seizures, or a decreased level of alertness.

If the person breathed in fumes, move them to fresh air right away.

## **Before Calling Emergency**

Have this information ready:

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

Tests that may be done include:

- Blood and urine tests
- Bronchoscopy -- camera placed down the throat to look for burns in the airways and lungs
- Chest x-ray
- Electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Endoscopy -- camera down the throat to look for burns in the esophagus and the stomach

Treatment may include:

- Fluids through a vein (by IV)
- Medicine to treat symptoms
- Washing of the skin (irrigation), perhaps every few hours for several days
- Tube through the mouth into the stomach to wash out the stomach (gastric lavage)
- Breathing support, including tube through the mouth into the lungs and connected to a breathing machine (ventilator)

## Outlook (Prognosis)

How well someone does depends on how much fuel oil was swallowed and how quickly treatment is received. The faster medical help is given, the better the chance for recovery.

Swallowing such poisons can have severe effects on many parts of the body. Burns in the airway or gastrointestinal tract can lead to tissue necrosis, resulting in infection, shock, and death, even several months after the substance is first swallowed. Scars may form in these tissues leading to long-term difficulties with breathing, swallowing, and digestion.

If fuel oil gets into the lungs (aspiration), serious and possibly permanent lung damage can occur.

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