

What is Cyanide?

Cyanide is a chemical that often joins with other chemicals to create compounds. It could be a liquid, a colorless gas, or a crystal form. Most cyanide compounds are deadly poisons.

- Cyanide is used to manufacture paper, textiles, plastics and pesticides. Cyanide is also used to extract gold and silver from ore.
- There is cyanide in tobacco smoke, and vehicle exhaust.
- Some bacteria, fungi, and algae can release cyanide.
- Some plants that we eat contain very low levels of cyanide, such as almonds, soy, spinach, bamboo shoots, and cassava roots.
- Hydrogen cyanide is used for fumigation and is a chemical warfare agent. It is a colorless gas that may have a slight smell of almonds.

How are people exposed to cyanide?

- You can get exposed by breathing air, drinking water, touching soil, or eating food that contains the chemical.
- Tobacco smoke is the most common way people get exposed to cyanide. Smoke from fires or burning plastic also contains cyanide.
- If you breathe air near a hazardous waste site, it could expose you to cyanide.
- If you work in manufacturing, mining, farming, pest control, or are a steel or iron worker you could be at risk of cyanide.

How can cyanide affect my health?

- It depends how much cyanide you're exposed to, how you're exposed, and for how long. Cyanide is most harmful to the brain, nerves, and heart.



For questions or more information:

Texas Poison Control Network
1-800-222-1222

Texas Department of State
Health Services
1-888-681-0927
epitox@dshs.texas.gov

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How can cyanide affect my health?

- Breathing cyanide gas can be deadly, especially in enclosed places that trap the gas.
- Swallowing cyanide can cause serious injury or death.
- If you breathe, eat, or touch cyanide you can get sick within a few minutes. You might feel dizzy or weak. Headache, nausea, vomiting, rapid breathing, and rapid heart rate are also symptoms of exposure to cyanide.
- Exposure to large amounts of cyanide can cause convulsions and a loss of consciousness. It can slow your breathing and heart rate, resulting in death.

How can I reduce my exposure to cyanide?

- If you work in manufacturing, mining, farming, pest control, steel or iron work, ask your supervisor about possible exposure. Your employer must provide you with information about hazardous chemicals at work, such as cyanide. They have to give you training about proper handling. It's the law in Texas (Texas Hazard Communication Act, Chapter 502 of the Texas Health and Safety Code). Ask your workplace for training and protective gear to keep you safe.
- If you smoke, don't smoke in enclosed places, like your car, or near your family or children.
- You should avoid eating apricot pits, peach pits, and apple seeds to prevent accidental cyanide poisoning.

What if I have symptoms of cyanide exposure?

- Move to fresh air. Call 911 immediately. Don't wait to get help. Antidotes for cyanide poisoning have to be given as soon as possible.
- For questions or more information, contact the Texas Department of State Health Services: 1-800-588-1248 epitox@dshs.texas.gov

