



# PUBLIC FACT SHEET

## VESICANT/BLISTER AGENT POISONING

### What are blister agents?

Blister agents are poisons that lead to serious illnesses. Blister agents are highly reactive chemicals that combine the proteins, DNA, and other cellular components to result in immediate bodily damage after exposure.

There are five main categories of blister agents: mustards, lewisites, phosgene oxime, arsine, and cyanide.

Blister agents were most commonly used for chemical warfare during World War I.

### What are the possible methods of exposure?

- Lung (inhalation)
  - breathing of harmful chemicals
- Contact
  - touching or handling of products that have the blister agent poison
  - touching contaminated products or agents and then rubbing around the eye area

Exposure could occur through a bioterrorist event.

### What are the possible symptoms of blister agent exposure?

Symptoms of blister agents vary depending on the amount and route of exposure, the type of illness and the condition of the person exposed, and usually will occur within 24 hrs.

- nasal pain
- sore throat
- cough
- shortness of breath
- chest tightness
- itching
- blisters
- red or swollen eye
- blurred vision
- blindness
- arterial blockage and cardiac arrest
- abdominal pain
- nausea and vomiting
- diarrhea
- coma
- convulsions

### What is the treatment for exposure to blister agents?

If you have been exposed blister agents, contact the emergency medical authorities immediately.

Research is in its beginning stages of determining treatment for exposure. If the person has any of the symptoms above they should be taken immediately for emergency medical treatment.

### For more information on blister agents contact:

Ottawa County Health Department  
[www.miOttawa.org](http://www.miOttawa.org)

Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/vesicant/tsd.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/vesicant/tsd.asp)  
Phone: (888) 246-2675