



# PUBLIC FACT SHEET

## HYDROGEN CYANIDE

### What is hydrogen cyanide?

At room temperature, hydrogen cyanide is a dangerous, colorless-to-blue liquid. It rapidly becomes a gas that can produce death in minutes if breathed. Hydrogen cyanide is used in making fibers, plastics, dyes, pesticides, and other chemicals, and as a fumigant to kill rats. It is also used in electroplating metals and in developing photographic film.

### What are possible methods of exposure?

- breathing air that contains cyanide
  - smoking cigarettes
  - smoke filled air during fires
  - breathing near hazardous waste sites containing cyanide
- drinking water that contains cyanide
- touching soil that contains cyanide
- eating foods that contain cyanide

### What are possible symptoms of hydrogen cyanide exposure?

#### Inhalation:

- low dose
  - rapid breathing
  - dizziness
  - headache
  - nausea and vomiting
  - rapid heart rate
- high dose
  - convulsions
  - low blood pressure
  - slow heart rate
  - lose of consciousness
  - respiratory failure

### How is hydrogen cyanide detected?

Hydrogen cyanide has a faint, bitter almond odor and a bitter, burning taste.

### What is the treatment for exposure to hydrogen cyanide?

If you have been exposed to hydrogen cyanide, contact the emergency medical authorities immediately.

The treatment of cyanide poisoning includes breathing pure oxygen, and in the case of serious symptoms, treatment with specific cyanide antidotes. Persons with serious symptoms will need to be hospitalized.

### For more information on hydrogen cyanide contact:

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

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

[www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/cyanide/](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/cyanide/)  
Phone: (888) 246-2675