



# PUBLIC FACT SHEET

## PHOSGENE

### What is phosgene?

Phosgene is an industrial chemical used primarily in plastics and pesticides. It is a liquid at cooler temperatures, and a poisonous gas at room temperature. Phosgene gas may appear colorless or as a white to pale yellow cloud.

### How are people exposed to phosgene?

- release of phosgene gas into the air
  - by skin or eye contact
  - by breathing contaminated air
- release of phosgene liquid into water or food
  - touching or drinking contaminated water
  - touching or drinking contaminated food

Phosgene release could occur from leakage from tank trucks and rail cars. It could also occur as an act of bioterrorism.

### What are possible symptoms?

Symptoms can be immediate or delayed up to 48 hours.

- Immediate Symptoms:
  - coughing
  - burning sensation in throat and eyes
  - watery eyes
  - blurred vision
  - shortness of breath
  - nausea and vomiting

- Delayed
  - difficulty breathing
  - coughing up pink colored fluid
  - low blood pressure
  - heart failure

### How is phosgene detected?

At low concentrations phosgene may go unnoticed or it may have a pleasant smell of green corn or newly mowed hay. At higher concentrations the odor is strong and unpleasant.

### What is the treatment for phosgene?

- immediately get fresh air if exposed to phosgene gas
- get to higher ground (phosgene sinks to lowest-lying areas)
- remove contaminated clothing
- wash entire body with soap and water
- if blurred vision or burning eyes occur, rinse eyes with plain water
- if phosgene was swallowed, do NOT induce vomiting
- in all cases call 911 immediately and seek medical attention

### For more information on phosgene contact:

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

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