

Shelter-In-Place

The Threat of Chemical Agents

Chemical agents are poisonous gases, liquids or solids that have toxic effects on people, animals and plants. Chemical, biological, or radiological contaminants may be released accidentally or intentionally into the environment. Most chemical agents cause serious injuries or death. Severity of injury depends on the type and amount of the chemical agent used, and the duration of exposure. Were a chemical agent attack to occur, local authorities would instruct the public to do one of two things:

- Evacuate immediately
- Shelter in Place.

But you should take action if you notice any of the following:

- An unusual smell or sound, such as an explosion.
- Visible smoke, fire, or a vapor cloud.
- Skin or eye irritation.
- Breathing difficulty.

Guidelines for Evacuation

EVACUATION means to leave the area of actual or potential hazard. Emergency managers carefully develop plans and procedures for evacuation to avoid confusion and get people out of an area safely and quickly. If the order is to evacuate, do so immediately and carefully follow all directions. DO NOT wander around but know where you are going and how to get there.

[Click here for more information on creating an evacuation plan for your family.](#)

Guidelines for Sheltering In Place

The most important thing for you to do is follow the instructions of local authorities and know what to do if they advise you to shelter-in-place.

Remember that instructions to shelter-in-place are usually provided for durations of a few hours, not days or weeks. There is little danger that the room in which you are taking shelter will run out of oxygen and you will suffocate.

Remember this rule of thumb

Ten square feet of floor space per person
will provide sufficient air to prevent carbon dioxide build-up
for up to five hours.

If the order is to remain in your home, office or school, you will need to follow these directions:

- Move or stay inside.
- Close and lock all windows and doors.

- Turn off the ventilation systems (heating, air conditioning, fireplace dampers, fans, etc.).
- Get your family disaster supplies kit and make sure the radio is working.
- Bring your pets with you, and be sure to bring additional food and water supplies for them.
- Go into a room with the fewest doors and windows and seal the room (see instructions below).
- It is ideal to have a hard-wired telephone in the room you select. Call your emergency out-of-area contact and have the phone available if you need to report a life-threatening condition.
- Turn on the radio or TV and listen for updates or further instructions from local authorities.
- Stay in this room until local authorities announce that it is safe to come out.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a wet cloth if necessary.

You can use your entire house or only a few rooms. Make sure you choose an area that has a telephone, water, a toilet, and someplace you can seal off easily. A bedroom is an excellent choice.

How to Seal a Room

- Dampen towels and place over the crack under the door.
- Cut plastic sheeting to fit over the windows and vents. Secure the plastic in place with duct tape.
- Tape around the door.

DO NOT ventilate (or air out) or leave your sealed shelter until you are told to do so. Avoiding chemical exposure is your primary goal. Leaving your sealed shelter to rescue or assist victims can be a deadly decision.

There is no assistance that the **UNTRAINED** can offer victims of a chemical attack that would likely be of any value to them.

If You Think You Have Been Exposed to a Chemical Agent

If you were outside before taking shelter and think you may have been exposed to a chemical agent, there are several things you can do.

- If you are in a sealed shelter, take off at least your outer clothes, put them in a plastic bag and seal the bag.
- If water is available, wash or take a cool to warm (not hot) shower, using lots of soap and water. Do not put the soap in your eyes; just use lots of water.
- If you leave the area, tell emergency responders or medical staff at your destination that you may have been exposed.
- Tell the emergency responders about the sealed bag so that they can arrange for its safe removal after the emergency.

If you have symptoms of exposure, call 9-1-1 immediately and follow their instructions.