

Nerve Agents Patient Information Sheet

This handout provides information and follow up instructions for persons who have been exposed to nerve agents.

What are nerve agents?

Nerve agents are chemical warfare agents, similar to but much more potent than organophosphate insecticides. They are colorless to amber colored, odorless, tasteless liquids that may evaporate to create a vapor/gas. GB and VX are odorless, while GA has a slightly fruity odor, and GD has a slight camphor odor.

What immediate health effects can result from exposure to nerve agents?

Nerve agents are extremely toxic chemicals that attack the nervous system. As little as one drop to a few milliliters of nerve agent contacting the skin can lead to death within 15 minutes. Nerve agent exposure can cause runny nose, sweating, blurred vision, headache, difficulty breathing, drooling, nausea, vomiting, muscle cramps and twitching, confusion, convulsions, paralysis and coma. Symptoms occur immediately if you inhale nerve agent vapor/gas, but may be delayed for several hours if you get a nerve agent liquid on your skin.

Can nerve agent poisoning be treated?

There are antidotes for nerve agent poisoning but they must be administered quickly after exposure. Immediate decontamination is critical and hospitalization may be needed.

Are any future health effects likely to occur?

Complete recovery may take several months. After a severe exposure with prolonged seizures, permanent damage to the central nervous system is possible.

What tests can be done if a person has been exposed to nerve agents?

Activity of a blood enzyme called acetylcholinesterase can be measured to assess exposure and recovery.

Where can more information about nerve agents be found?

More information about nerve agents can be obtained from your local poison control center, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), your doctor, or a clinic in your area that specializes in toxicology or occupational and environmental health. Ask the person who gave you this form for help locating these phone numbers.

Follow Up Instructions

Keep this page and take it with you to your next appointment. Follow **only** the instructions checked below.

- () Call your doctor or the Emergency Department if you develop any unusual signs or symptoms within the next 24 hours, especially:
Loss of memory, loss of coordination, dizziness
Coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath
Nausea, vomiting, cramps, diarrhea
Muscle weakness, twitching
Blurred vision
- () No follow up appointment is necessary unless you develop any of the signs or symptoms listed above.
- () Call for an appointment with Dr. _____ in the practice of _____ . When you call for your appointment, please say that you were treated in the Emergency Department at _____ hospital by Dr. _____ and were advised to be seen again in _____ days.
- () Return to the Emergency Department/ _____ clinic on _____ at _____ am/pm for a follow up examination.
- () Do not perform vigorous physical activities for 1 – 2 days.
- () You may resume everyday activities including driving and operation machinery.
- () Do not return to work for _____ days.
- () Avoid exposure to cigarette smoke for 72 hours; smoke may worsen the condition of your lungs.
- () You may return to work on a limited basis. See instructions below.
- () Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages for at least 24 hours; alcohol may worsen injury to your stomach or have other adverse effects.
- () Avoid taking the following medications: _____.
- () You may continue taking the following medications you doctor prescribed for you:

- () Other instructions: _____

- Provide the Emergency Department with the name and number of your primary care physician so the ED can send him/her a record of your emergency department visit.
 - You or your physician can get more information on the chemical by contacting _____ or checking the following web sites : _____.

Patient Signature _____ Date _____

Physician Signature _____ Date _____