



PUBLIC FACT SHEET

RICIN

What is ricin?

Ricin is produced from the beans of the castor plant. It has many uses commercially, such as additives in paint and motor oils. It is also a potent poison and could be used as a weapon of bioterrorism. Ricin can exist in the form of a powder, liquid or aerosol for intentional dispersal.

What are possible methods of exposure?

There are three forms of exposure to ricin:

- Inhalation
 - breathing ricin an aerosol form
- Ingestion
 - eating the beans of the castor plant
 - eating or drinking food contaminated with ricin
- Injection

What are possible symptoms of ricin exposure?

Symptoms of ricin depend on the amount and route of exposure. Possible symptoms may include:

Inhalation:

- nose/throat pain
- cough (may be bloody)
- chest tightness/pain
- difficulty breathing
- fever
- nausea

Ingestion:

- abdominal pain
- nausea and vomiting
- diarrhea (may be bloody)
- fever

- hallucinations and seizures
- blood in the urine

Injection:

- death of surrounding tissue
- many of the respiratory and intestinal symptoms noted above

How is ricin diagnosed?

Ricin is difficult to diagnose. The diagnosis is usually based on the clinical symptoms, especially if there is a mass casualty situation where all the victims display symptoms of ricin poisoning.

What is the treatment for exposure to ricin?

Since there is presently no antibiotic or vaccine treatment for ricin, hospital care may be necessary to treat the effects of the toxin. If you are exposed to ricin you should:

- leave the area immediately where the ricin was released and get fresh air
- contact the emergency medical authorities
- remove clothing that may have ricin on it; contain it in multiple sealed bags
- wash with soap and water

For more information on ricin contact:

Ottawa County Health Department
www.miOttawa.org

Center for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/ricin/facts.asp>
Phone: (888) 246-2675