

# SARIN

## Polk County Preparations

Because of ongoing concerns about potential terrorist attacks, the U.S. government is working to improve overall preparation against terrorism. One aspect of this preparation is to learn more about protecting against possible attacks using chemical agents.

If a public health emergency happens in our community, the Polk County Public Health Department will be the local agency responsible for preparing and guiding medical response and public information efforts. During such an emergency, a critical role of the Public Health Department will be to work with other local first responders, such as fire and police. The Public Health Department will also coordinate response activities with state and federal agencies.

The Polk County Public Health Department is providing information to help you understand what sarin is and what kind of response you should take in the event that you would be exposed to sarin.

## What is Sarin?

Sarin is a colorless, odorless nerve agent that is considered to be among the most poisonous and fast acting of the known chemical warfare agents. People can be exposed to sarin in several ways. If it is released into the air, you can inhale and breathe it into your lungs or absorb it through your skin and eyes. It is also possible to swallow sarin because in liquid form it could be used to contaminate food or water.

## Sarin and Terrorism

Originally developed as an insecticide, sarin is a human-made liquid that can also be transformed into a gas through evaporation. In this vapor state, sarin can be released into the air. In 1995, sarin gas was used in two separate terrorist attacks in Japan.

In the event of a terrorist attack with sarin, the Public Health Department and emergency officials will provide emergency information and instructions on how to protect yourself and your family. You may be asked to evacuate (leave the area) or shelter-in-place (remain inside a building). In either case, it is important that you and your family have an Emergency Preparation Plan.

## Symptoms of Exposure to Sarin

Exposure to low or moderate levels of sarin can result in runny nose, watery eyes, eye pain, blurred vision and very small pupils; chest tightening, cough and rapid breathing; drooling and excessive sweating; confusion, drowsiness and weakness. Other symptoms include headache; general body weakness; nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain; diarrhea; increased urination; and changes in blood pressure and heart rate.

Exposure to larger doses over a longer period of time can result in loss of consciousness, convulsions, paralysis and respiratory failure. Symptoms of exposure to any amount of sarin may happen within seconds to hours.

## Treatment for Exposure to Sarin

Treatment consists of removing sarin from the body as soon as possible and providing supportive medical care to relieve symptoms. Antidotes are available for sarin. They are most useful if given as soon as possible after exposure.

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**If you were exposed to Sarin**

- **Move away from the source.** It is important to get away from the area of release as quickly as possible. Because sarin is heavier than air, it will sink to low-lying places so you should get to the highest ground available. If released indoors, get out of the building immediately.
- **Quickly remove clothing.** If possible, cut clothing off the body instead of pulling it over the head since it may get onto the skin. Avoid touching contaminated clothing. If you are helping other people, use gloves.
- **Place your clothing, shoes, etc. inside a plastic bag.** If you can, wear rubber gloves and use tongs, sticks, etc. or turn the bag inside out to pick up the clothes. Seal the bag and place it inside another plastic bag. This will protect you and other people from sarin that might be on the items.
- **As quickly as possible, immediately wash your skin** with large amounts of regular soap and water.
- **If your eyes are burning or your vision is blurred, rinse your eyes with plain water** for 10-15 minutes. If you wear contacts, remove them and put them with the contaminated clothing. If eyeglasses or jewelry were exposed, wash them with soap and water. Put them back on after washing.
- **When emergency personnel arrive,** tell them what you did with your clothes and other items. Emergency personnel will arrange for further disposal. Do not handle the plastic bags yourself.
- **If sarin has been swallowed,** do not induce vomiting, do not give fluids to drink.
- **Seek medical attention right away.** Stay calm. Dial 911 and explain what has happened.

If you have any questions about sarin, please contact the **Polk County Health Department at 515-286-3798**. Public Health Department staff members are available to answer your questions Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For information about putting together an Emergency Preparation Plan, visit the Department of Homeland Security site at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov). Also, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web site at [www.bt.cdc.gov](http://www.bt.cdc.gov) for additional information.

