



PHOSGENE (COCl₂)

- What is PHOSGENE?** Phosgene is an industrial chemical and can be considered a chemical warfare agent. Phosgene is a colorless and nonflammable gas with a suffocating odor of green corn or newly cut hay. Phosgene is also known as carbonyl chloride. In the presence of water, sweat, saliva, or tears, the liquid, or gas becomes hydrochloric acid and can burn and damage the body.
- Exposure:** Primary route is by either inhalation, or absorption through the skin or eyes.
- Signs and Symptoms:** Symptoms depend on the route and amount of exposure. They include lung and heart damage, difficulty breathing, chest tightness, wheezing, irritation and redness of the eyes, nose, mouth and airways. Onset of symptoms after exposure is 1-24 hours, up to 72 hours.
- What can you do?** Emergency response leaders may direct people to evacuate, or “shelter in place”. If phosgene was released into the air, get fresh air by leaving the area where the phosgene was released. This is a good way to reduce the possibility of death from exposure to phosgene in the air.
- Treatment:** No specific treatment, or antidote. Remove contaminated clothing immediately and wash exposed skin/eyes. Supportive hospital care may be necessary. Victims should be kept warm and still. Activity can make symptoms worse and lead to death.
- Diagnosis:** Based on known or suspected exposure.
- Whom do you call?** Division of Public Health: 1-888-295-5156.
- For more information:** Visit the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website: <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/>.