

Commercial pesticides - Safety in the home

Community factsheet

Updated June 2018

Sometimes you might have pest problems that will be too difficult for you to manage yourself. For these jobs, you should hire a licensed pest control operator who may suggest the use of a pesticide.

What are pesticides?

Pesticides are substances used to manage pests and include insecticides used for insect control, herbicides used for weed control, and rodenticides used for rodent control.

Pesticides are toxic and if used carelessly they may damage the health of the person applying the pesticide, the health of other people in the community

and the environment. For this reason there is legislation governing the use of pesticides, and precautions that should be taken in order to minimise exposure to these substances.



How can pesticides affect my health?

Pesticides can take the form of a solid, liquid, gas or powder.

The form will influence the way in which the pesticide can enter your body and potentially affect your health.

There are four ways in which pesticides can enter the body:

- by swallowing pesticide, eating, drinking or smoking after handling pesticide, or consuming food or drink exposed to pesticide
- by skin coming into contact with pesticide — directly, through pesticide soaked clothing or pesticide treated surfaces
- by inhaling pesticide vapours, sprays or dusts
- by rubbing eyes after handling pesticide, or pesticide coming into direct contact with eyes.

Minimising your exposure and taking care when coming into contact with pesticides will reduce the chance of experiencing adverse health effects.

Poisoning and first aid

Poisoning, as a result of exposure to pesticides, may occur shortly after a single exposure (acute poisoning) or gradually after repeated exposures over a period of time (chronic poisoning). The type, duration and severity of symptoms may vary depending on factors such as the type and concentration of the pesticide, the degree of exposure, and the health and age of the person exposed. Many of the potential symptoms are not specific to pesticide poisoning—they may be due to other conditions, such as illness or allergy.

Although anyone may be affected by exposure to pesticides, certain groups are particularly susceptible including:

- unborn babies and young children
- pregnant and nursing women
- elderly people.

If you or your family develop symptoms soon after exposure to pesticides, contact a doctor immediately or call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26. Remember to provide details of the exposure including the product name if possible. For further information regarding some of the potential symptoms of pesticide poisoning see below.

Acute poisoning

Symptoms may begin shortly after exposure and may include headache, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, blurred vision, excessive eye watering, sweating and salivation.

More severe poisoning may also lead to changes in heart rate, chest tightness, muscle weakness and twitching, difficulty breathing and walking, constricted pupils and incontinence.

In very severe cases of poisoning, seizures and unconsciousness may occur.

Chronic poisoning

Symptoms may occur gradually after repeated exposures over a period of time and may include muscle weakness and fatigue, difficulty concentrating and remembering things and generally feeling unwell.



Pest control operators take extra precautions, such as wearing protective clothing, because they are around pesticides all the time and are at a greater risk of exposure.

Safety precautions

- use only a licensed pest control operator
- obtain the full chemical name of the pesticide to be used - in the event of an emergency this will assist with first aid
- ensure food, clothes, toys, toothbrushes, bedding, towels, vegetable gardens, barbecues, pet bowls, fish ponds, clotheslines and cooking utensils are covered or removed from the area to be treated
- relocate pets during treatment and until the pesticide is dry
- if the pesticide is to be applied outdoors, ensure that all doors and windows are closed
- vacate the premises while the pesticide is mixed and applied, and until the pesticide is dry. Four to six hours is generally recommended but your pest control operator will recommend the appropriate time based on the specific treatment option used.
- if the pesticide has been applied indoors, ensure that benchtops and kitchen utensils are thoroughly cleaned prior to food preparation and ventilate the house, by opening all doors and windows, for a few hours upon return
- it is recommended that you advise your neighbours in advance of any external pesticide treatments.

Raise any concerns such as how the pesticide could affect pregnancy, young children or allergies with your pest control operator before they start work so that they can discuss treatment options with you. A good pest control operator will listen to your concerns and address them by using the most appropriate pest control method.

Although pesticides are toxic and there are risks associated with pesticide use, licensed pest control operators are trained in the safe handling, storage and application of these substances.

If the appropriate precautions are taken to minimise exposure to pesticides, the risk to health is greatly reduced.

Pest control licensing

Due to the potential risks involved in handling pesticides, anyone who uses pesticides in the course of a pest control business in Victoria is required to hold a **pest control licence** issued



by the Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about pest control licensing contact the Department of Health and Human Services on 1300 767 469.

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